

# **Nestor Makhno**

Nestor Makhno



1907-1933

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# Summons

Nestor Makhno

1907

Let us rise in revolt, brethren, and with us the people  
Beneath the black flag of Anarchy will revolt.  
We will surge boldly forward, under the fire  
of enemy bullets in the battle  
for faith in libertarian communism,  
Our just regime.  
We shall cast down all thrones and  
bring low the power of Capital.  
We will seize the gold and purple scepter  
And pay no more honor to anything.  
Through savage struggle  
We shall rid ourselves of the State and its laws.  
We have suffered long under the yoke  
Of chains, prisons and teeming gangs of executioners.  
The time has come to rise in rebellion and close ranks.  
Forward beneath the black flag of Anarchy, on to the great struggle!  
Enough of serving tyrants as their tools,  
That is the source of all their might.  
Insurrection, brethren, laboring people!  
We will sweep away all carrion.  
That's the way we shall reply to the lies of tyrants,  
We free workers, armed with our determination.  
Long live freedom, brethren. Long live the free commune.  
Death to all tyrants and their jailers!  
Let us rise, brethren, on the agreed signal,  
Beneath the black flag of Anarchy, against every one of them,  
the tyrants.  
Let us destroy all authorities and their cowardly restraints,  
that push us into bloody battle!

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[marxists.architecturez.net/reference/archive/makhno-nestor/works/1907/summons.htm](http://marxists.architecturez.net/reference/archive/makhno-nestor/works/1907/summons.htm). Taken  
from Nestor Makhno—Anarchy's Cossack: The Struggle for Free Soviets in the Ukraine  
1917-1921, by Alexandre Skirda, translated by Paul Sharkey, published 2003.

Written: when Nestor Makhno was 23 years old and had been in prison for two years for  
“illegal subversive association”; Source: EndPage.com.

# **My Visit to the Kremlin**

Nestor Makhno

1979

**Cover notes:** The Ukrainian peasant Nestor Makhno visited Moscow in June, 1918 and had extensive interviews with the Bolshevik leaders Sverdlov and Lenin. This account amounts to two chapters from his memoirs and deals with his encounters with the Bolshevik murderers. It is presented for the second time in English by the KSL, originally being published by Black Cat Press in 1979.

*This is the first in a series on the history of the now defunct USSR. Others to follow may include secrets of anarchist activity and resistance from the Russian Archives.*

**Dedication to 1993 edition:** This edition is dedicated to the memory of Leah Feldman (1899–1993), who merits a biography of her own. A dedicated anarchist all her life she fought in many countries for her ideals, and was possibly one of the oldest survivors of the Makhno peasant army.

## Translators Introduction

The Ukrainian peasant anarchist Nestor Makhno visited Moscow in June 1918 and was granted extensive interviews with the Bolshevik leaders Sverdlov and Lenin. Many years later Makhno, an exile in France, wrote his memoirs of the tumultuous years 1917–18. “My Visit to the Kremlin” is a translation of the two chapters which deal with his encounters with the Bolshevik titans. Excerpts from these interviews have been quoted in various works in English but the full account was presented here for the first time (1979).<sup>1</sup>

(This pamphlet was sent by us to a Moscow publisher in 1992 and will appear in a re-translated edition in Russia for the first time simultaneously with this new edition — 1993 note).

### Moscow in June 1918

In June 1918 the Bolshevik regime was enjoying a brief respite from the rigours of revolution and civil war. Although surrounded on all sides by hostile forces, the Bolsheviks were in no immediate military danger. This welcome hiatus, lasting from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) to the collapse of the Central Powers at the end of the year, allowed the Bolsheviks to consolidate their political and military strength.

From the point of view of the Russian anarchists, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk represented the watershed of the Revolution. In coming to terms with the Central Powers, the Bolsheviks had paid a staggering price in territory and resources. But, more importantly, they had preferred to make a pact with the imperialists rather than attempt to propagate the Revolution through popular initiatives, in particular, by partisan warfare.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks turned against their erstwhile allies, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the anarchists. The Cheka, ostensibly created to suppress counter-revolutionaries, was unleashed on the Bolsheviks' critics on the left. The immediate pretext for the suppression of the Moscow anarchists occurred when the representative of the US government complained his automobile had been stolen by anarchists. (According to a representative of the British Government, Bruce Lockhart, it was Trotsky's car that was taken). On the night of

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<sup>1</sup> David Footman in “Civil War in Russia” (London 1961), chap 6. Paul Avrich, “The Russian Anarchists” (Princeton 1967) pp.210–211. Michael Palij, “The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno 1918–21” (Seattle 1976) chaps 7,9.

<sup>2</sup> Voline, “The Unknown Revolution 1917–1921” (Detroit 1974) pp 239–246

April 11, twenty-six anarchist centres were raided by the Cheka. The largest centre, the House of Anarchy on Malaia Dimitrovka Street (formerly the Chamber of Commerce) was the scene of a fierce battle. Dozens of anarchists and Chekists were killed and hundreds arrested during the night of terror.<sup>3</sup> This unequal battle was repeated in many other Russian cities.

The official suppression of the anarchists was not without repercussions within the Communist Party itself.<sup>4</sup> For a time after Brest-Litovsk a group within the top leadership associated with Bukharin contemplated a coup against Lenin, in order to halt the rapid slide to the right. But these dissidents soon reverted to uncritical support of the regime.<sup>5</sup>

## The Ukraine in 1918

While the Revolution had already spent itself in Russia, in the Ukraine it had hardly begun. The Ukraine was predominantly a peasant region: in 1918 only one per cent of the population could be classified as industrial workers and these were concentrated in a few centres in the east and south. The peasants of the Ukraine reacted slowly to the overthrow of Tsarist power and the resulting political vacuum. But their revolution gradually gained momentum, until it became an all-encompassing movement with few parallels in the history of popular insurrection.<sup>6</sup>

After the February revolution in 1917, a weak nationalist government, the Central Rada<sup>7</sup> was established in Kiev. This government failed to gain recognition from either the Provisional Government in Petrograd or the successor Bolshevik regime. Early in 1918 a Bolshevik army under General Antonov invaded the Ukraine. The Central Rada was unable to muster popular support to repel the invasion force, which consisted almost entirely of non-Ukrainian soldiers. After the invaders captured Kiev in early February, the Central Rada signed a peace treaty with the Central Powers and sought military aid against the Bolsheviks. Austrian and German troops then entered the Ukraine, clearing it of Russian troops and various partisan groups by the end of April. Once they had occupied the Ukraine, the Central Powers proceeded to loot the country of all the foodstuffs and raw materials they could lay their hands on. Finding the Central Rada more of a nuisance than an aid in this project, the occupying forces engineered a coup by the aristocratic landowner Pavel Skoropadsky on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Skoropadsky proclaimed himself Hetman of all the Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> The Hetmanate represented a return to feudal reaction complete with elaborate costumes and religious-historical ceremonies. In the countryside the revolutionary elements were driven underground or into exile.

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<sup>3</sup> Avrich, "The Russian Anarchists", pp 183–185. In anarchist historiography, this event is comparable to the suppression of left-wing militants in Barcelona in May 1937 by the Communist and republican forces.

<sup>4</sup> The name of the party was changed from Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Bolshevik) to Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in March 1918. The capital of the Russian state was moved at the same time from Petrograd to Moscow.

<sup>5</sup> Robert V. Daniels, "The Conscience of the Revolution", chap.3.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur E. Adams, "The Great Ukrainian Jacquerie", in Taras Hunczak, ed. "The Ukraine 1917–1921, A Study in Revolution" (Cambridge, Mass. 1977)

<sup>7</sup> 'Rada' means 'council' and is the Ukrainian equivalent of the Russian word 'soviet'.

<sup>8</sup> 'Hetman' is roughly translated as 'chieftain' and was the title held by leaders of the Ukrainian Cossacks during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## **Makhno**

Nestor Makhno was 27 when he visited the Russian capital in 1918. He had spent a third of his life behind bars, including seven years in Moscow's Butyrki prison. Arrested in 1908 for anarchist activities in the region of his native village of Guylai-Polye, he was sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labour. Released by the February Revolution, he returned to Gulai-Polye. The only survivor of the revolutionary group which had been crushed there a decade earlier<sup>9</sup>. Makhno immediately threw himself into organising unions, communes and soviets- The Central Rada's authority scarcely extended into the region of the Ukraine where Makhno was active; the local peasant groups proceeded to expropriate the landed gentry on their own initiative. When the Bolsheviks invaded the Ukraine for the first time in January 1918, Makhno and his anarchist partisan group assisted them by expelling the weak forces of the Central Rada from the Left Bank Ukraine (east of the Dnieper river).

Three months later when the Bolsheviks were pushed out of the eastern end of the Ukraine by combined Austro-German and Central Rada forces, Makhno's partisans and several other anarchist bands retreated with them. At the end of April a conference of Ukrainian anarchists was held in the coastal town of Taganrog, temporarily under Bolshevik control. The conference decided on a policy of organising an underground movement in the Ukrainian villages. Makhno was delegated to make a two-month trip to Russia to contact other anarchist groups and determine the Bolsheviks' attitude towards anarchist activity in the Ukraine<sup>10</sup>. Makhno made his way slowly across the chaotic hinterland of young Soviet Russia, surviving several harrowing adventures. Arriving in Moscow at the beginning of June, he met with the leading anarchists as well as representatives of other political factions. The anti-Bolshevik left was leading a tenuous existence, still tolerated by the authorities, but deprived of freedom of action. Coming from a region where revolutionary activity was still on the upswing and the old social order had yet to be overthrown, Makhno was impatient with the stagnation and defeatism he encountered in Moscow . In his memoirs he writes disparagingly of the "paper revolution" of the Russian intellectuals as opposed to the vigorous anarchist movement he expected to evolve in the Ukraine<sup>11</sup>.

## **Lenin and Sverdlov**

Makhno's ostensible purpose in visiting the Kremlin was to apply for a free room ticket. But one can be sure he hoped to sound out the Bolshevik leaders on their attitude toward peasant revolution in the Ukraine. In this he was eminently successful. In June 1918 the Bolshevik government was still sufficiently flexible and informal that a "semi-literate peasant" (as Makhno describes himself) could wander through the corridors of power and meet face to face with the mightiest leaders. After a chance encounter with Bukharin, Makhno spoke next to Sverdlov's secretary, then Sverdlov himself, who later introduced Makhno to Lenin. The Bolshevik leaders were generally young men, not much older than Makhno, with long records of experience in the revolutionary movement. Bukharin was 30, Sverdlov 33 when Makhno met them. Lenin at 48 had long been referred to by his associates as the "Old Man". At one point in 1918 Lenin remarked to Trotsky, "If the White Generals kill us, you and me, do you think Bukharin and Sverdlov could

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<sup>9</sup> The same, pp.67-70

<sup>10</sup> The same, chap. 8.

<sup>11</sup> The same, pp 90-91.

manage things?”<sup>12</sup> This indicates that Makhno was able to meet three of the top four Bolsheviks (Trotsky seems to have been in Moscow at the time but was totally occupied in organising the Red Army).

Yakov Sverdlov is little remembered today because of his early death in March 1919, a victim of the world-wide influenza epidemic. But in 1918, as chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets he was technically the head of the Soviet state. Of more practical significance, Sverdlov was also the de facto General Secretary of the Russian Communist Party, a position later made more famous by his eventual successor, Josef Stalin.

Sverdlov’s qualifications for these exalted positions were his many years of service to the Bolshevik underground and his slavish devotion to Lenin. Unlike his colleagues in the top echelon, Sverdlov had no reputation as a theorist. Indeed, according to a biographical sketch written by another Bolshevik leader, Sverdlov “had no ideas ... he never originated anything.” Sverdlov was noted rather for his organising talents and an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Party.<sup>13</sup> In his capacity as Party Secretary, Sverdlov was constantly called upon to make quick judgments of character in assigning Party members to suitable posts. Presumably it was his ability to size up people which caused him to devote so much time to an obscure peasant agitator and commend him to Lenin’s attention.

## The Interviews

Since these interviews were written by Makhno many years after the event, it is necessary to consider the accuracy of his account. Evidently the Bolshevik leaders made a strong impression on Makhno and he must have discussed his encounters with them thoroughly with his Moscow comrades. So while the record cannot be taken as a literal transcript, it seems reasonable to infer that it represents a close approximation to what actually transpired.

But it must be remembered that in writing his memoirs, an effort he pursued doggedly under the most difficult circumstances, Makhno was not interested primarily in serving the needs of professional historians. Rather he was writing to the Ukrainian peasants and workers whose aspirations he had tried to advance, explaining the interpretations of their lost revolution. In this connection, the authenticity of Makhno’s clashes with the Bolsheviks over Ukrainian sovereignty is open to question. He portrays Sverdlov and Lenin as Great Russian chauvinists and himself as a supporter of some form of Ukrainian autonomy.<sup>14</sup> There is little doubt Sverdlov and Lenin were opposed to Ukrainian autonomy in 1918, but for Makhno at that time “Ukrainian” was more of a political than a national designation, reserved for his enemies the adherents of the Central Rada. So the emphasis on his nationality may be a later interpolation. Makhno’s views on the national question evidently underwent some development during his exile, although his commitment to anti-statism precluded his becoming a nationalist.

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<sup>12</sup> Leon Trotsky, “My Life” (New York 1930) p. 338. Trotsky replied, “Perhaps they won’t kill us.”

<sup>13</sup> Anatol Lunacharsky, “Revolutionary Silhouettes” (London 1967). Lunacharsky includes the bizarre detail that Sverdlov was in the habit of dressing entirely in black leather.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Sysyn, “Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution”, in Hunczak (already mentioned).

# MY VISIT TO THE KREMLIN by Nestor Makhno

## First Encounters

I arrived at the gates of the Kremlin determined to see Lenin and, if possible, Sverdlov, and to have a talk with them. A soldier was seated behind a wicket. I handed him my credentials from the Moscow Soviet. After reading it carefully, he made out a pass, attached it to my credential, and I passed through into the interior of the Kremlin. Inside a Latvian rifleman was pacing back and forth.<sup>15</sup> I went round him and started to enter the main square when I found myself nose to nose with another sentry. I asked him to point out the building to which I was to go. From that point on, I was free to walk around, to look at the various cannon and shot dating as far back as before the time of Peter the Great, to stop in front of the Tsar's Great Bell and other well-known curiosities, or to go directly into one of the palaces.

I turned to the left and was swallowed up in one of these palaces (I've forgotten its name) and I climbed a stair up to the third floor. Then I strode down a long, empty corridor where there were placards hanging on the doors reading 'Central Committee of the Party' or 'Library'. Having need of neither the one nor the other I continued on my way without being aware whether or not anyone was behind these doors.

Some of the placards didn't have any names on them, so I reversed my steps, stopped in front of the one which read 'Central Committee of the Party', and knocked on the door. "Enter," replied a voice. Inside the office three people were sitting together in perfect silence. Among them I seemed to recognise Zagorsksi whom I had seen two or three days earlier in one of the Bolshevik Party clubs. I asked these people where I might find the office of the Central Commmittee Executive.

One of the three (Bukharin, if I am not mistaken), got up and took his briefcase under his arm. Addressing his colleagues loudly enough so I could hear, he said, "I'm leaving, I'll show this comrade the office of the CCE," indicating me with his chin and starting for the door. I thanked the people present and left with the one whom I believed to be Bukharin. The hallway was as quiet as a tomb.

My guide asked me where I was from.

"From the Ukraine," I replied. He then asked me several questions about the terror which was raging in the Ukraine and wanted to know how I was able to reach Moscow. Arriving at the stair, we stopped to continue the conversation. Finally, my accidental guide indicated a door to the right of the entrance of the corridor where, according to him, I would find the information I needed.

And after shaking my hand, he went down the stair and left the building.

I went to the door, knocked and entered. A girl asked me what I wanted.

"I would like to see the chairman of the Executive Commmittee of the Soviet of Workers, Peasants, Soldiers and Cossacks Deputies, comrade Sverdlov," I answered.

Without saying a word, the girl sat down at a table, took my credentials and pass, studied them, copied out some information, and made out another pass on which was indicated the number of the office to which I was to go.

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<sup>15</sup> The Latvian riflemen, 17,000 strong, were one of the mainstays of early Bolshevik power. They took part in the first Bolshevik invasion of the Ukraine in January 1918. John Erickson "The Origins of the Red Army" in Richard Pipes (ed.) "Revolutionary Russia".

In the office to which the girl sent me I found the secretary of the CCE, a sturdy man, who looked well-fed but with tired features. He asked me for my papers and I handed them over. He found them interesting and started asking questions.

“So, comrade, you’re from the South of Russia?”

“Yes, I’m from the Ukraine.”

“You were already chairman of a Committee for the Defence of the Revolution at the time of Kerensky?”<sup>16</sup>

“Yes.”

“Then you are a Socialist Revolutionary?” (i.e., member of the SR Party)

“No!”

“What connections do you have or have you had with the Communist Party in your region?”

“I am personally acquainted with several Bolshevik Party militants,” I replied. And I cited the name of the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Alexandrovsk, comrade Mikhailevitch, and some other militants from Ekaterinoslav.

The secretary was silent for a moment, then questioned me about the mentality of the peasants of the ‘South of Russia’, about their behaviour towards the German troops and the soldiers of the Central Rada, about their attitude towards Soviet power etc.

I gave him brief answers which apparently satisfied him; actually I regretted not being able to explain more fully.

Finally he telephoned someone and then invited me to go to the office of the chairman of the CCE, comrade Sverdlov.

## My Interview With Sverdlov

On the way I thought of the stories spread by the counter-revolutionaries, even by my own friends who were enemies of the policies of Lenin, Sverdlov and Trotsky, namely that it was impossible to gain access to these terrestrial gods. They were, supposedly, surrounded by a corps of bodyguards, the chief of whom would allow only visitors of whom he approved.

Now, accompanied by the secretary of the CCE, I realised the absurdity of these stories. Sverdlov opened the door himself with a pleasant smile, exuding friendliness, and taking me by the hand, led me to an armchair. The Secretary of the CCE returned to his office.

Comrade Sverdlov looked even more prosperous than his secretary. He also seemed more interested in what had transpired in the Ukraine during the last two or three months. He said to me straight off:

“So, comrade, you have come from our tormented South. What work were you carrying on there?”

“The work in which the great masses of the revolutionary workers of the Ukraine are engaged. These workers, having taken an active part in the Revolution, went on to struggle for their total emancipation. In their ranks, I was, if I may say so, always the first to advance towards this objective. Today, because of the collapse of the revolutionary Ukrainian front, I find myself temporarily stranded in Moscow.”

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<sup>16</sup> This committee was set up at Gulai-Polye in September 1917 in response to the attempted rightist coup by General Kornilov. The committee carried out revolutionary expropriations in the area of Gulai-Polye. Palij, “Anarchism of Nestor Makhno”, p.71

"What are you saying, comrade?" exclaimed Sverdlov, interrupting me. "The peasants of the South are mostly kulaks or partisans of the Central Rada."

I burst into laughter and briefly but succinctly described to him the action of the peasants organised by the anarchists in the region of Gulai-Polye against the Austro-German occupation troops and the soldiers of the Central Rada.

Evidently unsettled, comrade Sverdlov nevertheless continued:

"Then why didn't they support our Red Guard units? According to our information the peasants of the South are poisoned by extreme Ukrainian chauvinism and everywhere they have welcomed the German troops and the Central Rada's forces with enthusiasm as their liberators."

Agitatedly I began to refute Sverdlov's information about the Ukrainian campaign. I admitted to him that I myself was the organiser and chief of several battalions of peasant volunteers which were leading the revolutionary struggle against the Germans and the Central Rada. I assured him that the peasants could recruit from their own midst a powerful army to combat these enemies but they did not see clearly the purpose of the Revolutionary War. The units of Red Guards, fighting from their armoured trains, stayed close to the railway lines. They fell back at the first reverse without even bothering to pick up their own soldiers, abandoning tens of miles regardless of whether the enemy was advancing. These units, I complained, did not inspire confidence in the peasants who, isolated in their villages and lacking arms, were at the mercy of the hangmen of the Revolution. In fact the armoured trains of the Red Guards never even bothered to send detachments into villages situated close to the railways. They didn't give arms to the peasants nor encourage them to revolt against the enemies of the Revolution, to join the struggle themselves.

Sverdlov listened attentively, from time to time exclaiming, "Is this possible?" I cited several units of the Red Guard belonging to the groups of Bogdanov, Svirski, Sablin and others. Becoming more composed, I pointed out that the Red Guards could not inspire confidence in the peasant masses so long as they concentrated on defending the railways by means of armoured trains which allowed them to take the offensive rapidly but more often to retreat. Yet these masses saw in the Revolution the means of getting rid of their oppressors — not only the great landowners and rich kulaks, but also their lackeys, the State officials with their political and administrative power. Thus the peasants were ready to defend their conquests against the massacres and wholesale destruction of the Prussian Junkers<sup>17</sup> as well as the forces of the Hetman.

"Yes," said Sverdlov. "I think you are right about the Red Guards...but we have now reorganised them into the Red Army which is currently building up its forces.<sup>18</sup> If the peasants of the South are endowed with a revolutionary spirit such as you describe, there is a good chance the Germans will be wiped out and the Hetman will bite the dust in short order. Then Soviet Power will triumph in the Ukraine as well."

"That will depend on an underground movement being organised in the Ukraine. Personally I consider this movement more necessary than ever. Provided it takes a militant form it will incite the masses to open revolt in the cities and villages against the Germans and the Hetman. Without an insurrection of an essentially revolutionary character in the interior of the Ukraine,

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<sup>17</sup> Prussian Junkers – aristocratic landowners who dominated the officer corps of the German Army. The alliance between the Ukrainian landowners backing Skoropadsky and the German officers was a natural one.

<sup>18</sup> The Red Guards, the Bolshevik regime's first military force, were phased out and replaced by the Red Army in the spring of 1918. The Red Guard featured voluntary service and elected officers; the Red Army was based on conscription and control from above. Compulsory military service for the Russian working class was introduced on May 29 1918 and the first Red Army divisions were deployed about the time of Makhno's visit. Erickson, as before.

the Germans and Austrians will not be forced to evacuate the country and it will not be possible to threaten the Hetman and his supporters or to force them to flee with their protectors. Don't forget that because of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and political factors relating to foreign powers which our Revolution must take into account, an offensive by the Red Army at this time is inconceivable."<sup>19</sup>

While I was presenting my opinions, comrade Sverdlov was taking notes.

"In this case I share your point of view completely," he said. "But what are you? Communist or Left Socialist Revolutionary? That you are an Ukrainian I can tell by the language you use, but as to which of the two parties you belong, that I cannot determine."

This question, while it came as no surprise (the secretary of the CCE had already asked it) put me in an embarrassing position. What should I do? Say frankly to Sverdlov that I was an anarchist-communist, comrade and friend of those whom his party and its State system had crushed two months earlier in Moscow and other cities, or hide myself under another banner?

I was perplexed and Sverdlov realised it. I didn't want to reveal my conception of the social revolution and my political attitude in the middle of our interview. To dissemble was equally repugnant. That is why, after thinking for several seconds, I said to Sverdlov:

"Why are you so interested in my political affiliation? My papers show you who I am, where I am from, and the role I have played in a certain region, organising the workers of town and village as well as partisan groups and battalions of volunteers to fight against the counter-revolution raging in the Ukraine. Isn't that enough for you?"

Comrade Sverdlov apologised and asked me not to doubt his honour as a revolutionary or suspect him of losing confidence in me. His excuses seemed so sincere I felt ill at ease and, without further hesitation, declared I was an anarchist-communist of the Bakunin-Kropotkin type.<sup>20</sup>

"What sort of anarchist-communist are you, comrade, since you advocate organising the labouring masses and directing them in the struggle against capitalist power?" inquired Sverdlov, with a disarming smile.

To his astonishment, I replied to the chairman of the CCE:

"Anarchism is an ideology which is too realistic not to comprehend the modern world and real events. The part taken by its practitioners in these events is based on a clear understanding of the goal to be attained and the means to be used to reach it..."

"I have no objection to that, but you don't resemble in the least these Moscow anarchists who established themselves on Malaia Dimitrovka Street," Sverdlov told me, and he wanted to expand on this subject, but I interrupted him:

"The crushing of the anarchists of the Malaia Dimitrovka by your party is a tragedy which must not be repeated in the future in the interests of the revolution..."

Sverdlov muttered something into his beard and, rising from his chair, came up to me, put his hands on my shoulders and said:

"I see you are very well-informed about what has transpired since our retreat from the Ukraine and especially about the real feelings of the peasants. Ilyich, our comrade Lenin, would certainly be delighted to listen to you. Would you like me to phone him?"

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<sup>19</sup> Bolshevik Russia was officially at peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary. A Bolshevik invasion of the Ukraine would also be likely to provoke intervention by France and Great Britain.

<sup>20</sup> The anarchists in Russia were split into various factions, the main groupings being the anarcho-syndicalists and the anarchist-communists. Both tendencies drew inspiration from the writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Avrich, "The Russian Anarchists".

I replied that there wasn't much I could add for the benefit of comrade Lenin, but Sverdlov was already on the phone, advising Lenin that he had on hand a comrade possessing very important information about the peasants of the South of Russia and their attitude towards the German forces of occupation. And right away he asked Lenin when he could see me.

A moment later, Sverdlov hung up, and made out a pass allowing me to return the next day. Handing it to me, he said:

"Tomorrow, at one o'clock in the afternoon, come here directly. We will go together to comrade Lenin's office... Can I count on you?"

"Count on me," I replied. "But can I get a document from the secretariat of the Central Committee authorising the Moscow Soviet to give me a temporary and free lodging for myself? Otherwise I'm forced to sleep on a park bench."

"We will arrange everything tomorrow," Sverdlov replied. And I, saying goodbye to him, made my way out of the Tsar's palace to the gates of the Kremlin, again passing around the Latvian sentry, the rows of different calibre shot and cannon, casting a quick glance at the Tsar's Great Cannon. Until tomorrow...

I did not return to the apartment belonging to the Peasant Section of the Congress of Soviets, the chief of which was Burtsev, a former cellmate of comrade Arshinov.<sup>21</sup> Burtsev had provided shelter for many comrades including Archinov who were gradually becoming a burden to him. Instead I went to see the head of the Trade Union Centre, who had also served time in prison with Arshinov. But not finding him very receptive I went to find one noted, as they say, for being a "crazy", the anarchist Maslov.

Knowing comrade Maslov from our stint at hard labour together, I announced to him that since I had no place to spend the night, I was going to move in with him.

Comrade Maslov did not object and I stayed with him. Indeed, Mastov showed me special hospitality despite my criticisms of his peculiar individualism which prevented him from establishing fraternal relations with his former comrades in the Moscow organisation of anarcho-communists.

## My interview with Lenin

The following day, at one o'clock, I showed up again at the Kremlin where I found comrade Sverdlov. He led me immediately to Lenin. The latter welcomed me in a friendly manner. He grasped me by the arm and, patting me gently on the shoulder with his other hand, steered me into an armchair. After asking Sverdlov to settle himself in another chair, he went to his secretary and said to her, "Please don't disturb us until two o'clock." Then he sat down opposite me and began to ask questions.

His first question was: "What region are you from?" Then: "How did the peasants of your region understand the slogan ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS IN THE VILLAGES and what was the reaction of the enemies of this slogan – of the Central Rada in particular?" Finally: "Did the peasants of your region revolt against the Austro-German invaders? If so, what was lacking for the peasants revolt to be transformed into a general uprising in concert with the action of the Red Guard units, which have defended our revolutionary conquests with so much courage?"

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Arshinov, a fellow alumnus of Batyrki Prison, had a great influence on Makhno. He joined Makhno in the Ukraine in 1919 and later wrote the standard anarchist account of the Makhnovshchina.

To all these questions I gave brief replies. With his own peculiar talent, Lenin endeavoured to pose his questions in such a way that I could answer point by point. For example, the question: "How did the peasants of your region understand the slogan ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS IN THE VILLAGES?" Lenin repeated three times. He was astonished at my reply:

"The peasants understood this slogan in their own way. According to their interpretation, all power, in all areas of life, must be identified with the consciousness and will of the working people. The peasants understand that the soviets of workers and peasants of village, country and district are neither more nor less than the means of revolutionary organisation and economic self-management of working people in the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its lackeys, the Right socialists and their coalition government."<sup>22</sup>

"Do you think this way of interpreting our slogan is correct?" asked Lenin.

"Yes," I replied.

"Well, then, the peasants of your region are infected with anarchism!"

"Is that bad?"

"That's not what I meant. On the contrary, we're delighted because this will mean the victory of communism over capitalism," Lenin replied, adding, "But I doubt if this phenomenon is spontaneous; it is the result of anarchist propaganda and won't persist. I'm even inclined to believe that this revolutionary enthusiasm, crushed by the triumphant counter-revolution before it has had a chance to give birth to an organisation, has already disappeared."

I pointed out to Lenin that a political leader should not be a pessimist or a sceptic.

"Therefore according to you," Sverdlov interrupted, "We should encourage these anarchist tendencies in the life of the peasant masses?"

"Oh, your party will not encourage them," I replied.

Lenin seized the opportunity.

"And why should we encourage them? To divide the revolutionary forces of the proletariat, pave the way for the counter-revolution and end up by destroying ourselves along with the proletariat?"

I couldn't restrain myself and became quite upset. I pointed out to Lenin that anarchism and the anarchists had nothing in common with the counter-revolution and were not guiding the proletariat in that direction.

"Is that really what I said?" Lenin asked me and added, "I was trying to say that the anarchists, lacking mass organisations, are not in a position to organise the proletariat and the poor peasants. Consequently they are in no position to arouse them to defend, in the widest sense of the term, that which we have conquered and which is so dear to us."

The interview turned next to the other questions posed by Lenin. To one of them, the question of "*the Red Guard units and the revolutionary courage with which they have defended our common conquests*," Lenin compelled me to reply as completely as possible. Evidently the question worried him or reminded him of what the Red Guard formations had recently accomplished in the Ukraine, supposedly attaining the objective set for them by Lenin and his party, in the name of which they had been sent from Petrograd and other great, far-off cities of Russia. I remember Lenin's emotion, the emotion of a man who was passionately struggling against a social order which he hated and wished to destroy, when I said to him:

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<sup>22</sup> Makhno is referring to the Central Rada, which was dominated by members of the several Ukrainian socialist parties.

“Since I participated in the disarming of many Cossacks retreating from the German front at the end of December 1917 and the beginning of 1918, I am well informed on the ‘revolutionary courage’ of the Red Army and on its leaders in particular.<sup>23</sup> But it seems to me, comrade Lenin, that, basing yourself on second and third hand information, you are exaggerating their performance.”

“How’s that? You disagree?”

“The Red Guards have shown revolutionary spirit and courage, but not in the way you describe. The struggle of the Red Guards against the Haidamaks<sup>24</sup> of the Central Rada and, especially, against the German forces, has known moments when the revolutionary spirit and courage, as well as the actions of the Red Guards and their leaders, were revealed to be very weak. Certainly in most cases this can be attributed to the fact that Red Guard detachments have been formed hastily and operated against the enemy in a way quite different from either partisan troops or regular units.

“You must know that the Red Guards, regardless of their numbers, carried on the attack against the enemy by moving along the railroads. But the territory ten or fifteen miles from the railway lines was not occupied; the defenders of the revolution or the counter-revolution could come and go there freely. For this reason, surprise attacks succeeded almost inevitably. It was only near the cities and towns on the railway that the Red Guards organised a front from which to launch their attacks. But the rear areas and the immediate vicinity of the railway junctions remained without defenders. The offensive thrust of the revolution collapsed in the face of the counter-coup. The Red Guard units had hardly finished distributing their proclamations in a given region when the counter-revolutionary forces were on the offensive and forced them to retreat in their armoured trains. In fact the people in the villages didn’t even see the Red Guards and therefore couldn’t support them.”

“What are the revolutionary propagandists doing in the villages?” Lenin asked. “Are they not preparing the rural proletariat to provide fresh troops for the Red Guards passing near their neighbourhoods, or to form whole new corps of Red Guards to take up offensive positions against the counter-revolution?”

“Don’t get carried away. The revolutionary propagandists are very scarce in the villages and can’t do much. But every day hundreds of propagandists and secret supporters of the counter-revolution are appearing in the villages. In many localities, it’s too much to expect the revolutionary propagandists to create new forces and organise them against the counter-revolution. These times require decisive actions from all revolutionaries in all areas of life and of the workers’ struggle. Not to take this into account, especially in the Ukraine, allows the counter-revolutionaries backing the Hetman to develop and consolidate their power.”

Sverdlov kept his eyes sometimes on me, sometimes on Lenin. As for the latter, he clasped his hands, inclined his head, and was lost in thought. Then he straightened up and said: “All that you have just said to me is quite regrettable.”

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<sup>23</sup> The episode Makhno is referring to came about when the Central Rada allowed several troop trains of Cossacks to pass through the Ukraine on their way from the German front to their home in the Don basin, where an anti-Bolshevik uprising was in progress. Makhno’s anarchist partisans collaborated with local Bolsheviks in seizing a railway bridge over the Dneipr and disarming the Cossacks. Palij, “Anarchism of Nestor Makhno” pp.83–84.

<sup>24</sup> The original Haidamaks were Ukrainian rebels of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who rose against the Russian tsar and the Polish king. The name was revived by the nationalists of the Central Rada.

Turning to Sverdlov, he added, "By reorganising the Red Guard into the Red Army we are following the right path to victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie."

"Yes, yes," replied Sverdlov enthusiastically.

Next Lenin said to me: "What work do you intend to accomplish in Moscow?"

I replied that I wasn't staying long. In accordance with the decision of the conference of partisan groups held in Taganrog, I would be returning to the Ukraine early in July.

"Clandestinely?" Lenin asked.

"Yes," I replied.

Addressing Sverdlov, Lenin made this comment: "The anarchists are always full of self-denial, they are ready for any sacrifice. But they are blind fanatics, they ignore the present and think only of the distant future." Indicating that this was not directed at me, he added: "You, comrade, I think, have a realistic attitude towards the problems of our times. If only a third of the anarchists in Russia were like you, we the communists would be prepared to collaborate with them under certain conditions for the purpose of the free organisation of producers."

At this moment I felt rising up in me a profound feeling of respect for Lenin, despite my recent conviction that he was responsible for the annihilation of the anarchist organisation in Moscow, which had been the signal for the destruction of similar organisations in many other cities. And in my conscience I was ashamed of myself. Searching for the response which I must make to Lenin, I said to him point-blank:

"The Revolution and its conquests are dear to the anarchist-communists; in that respect they are like all other true revolutionaries."

"Oh, don't tell us that," retorted Lenin, laughing. "We know the anarchists as well as you. For the most part they have no idea of the present, or at least they concern themselves with it very little. But the present is so serious that for revolutionaries not to think about it or to take a position in a positive manner with respect to it is more than disgraceful. Most of the anarchists think and write about the future without understanding the present. That is what divides us, the communists, from you."

With these words Lenin got up from his chair and began pacing back and forth.

"Yes, yes, the anarchists are strong in ideas about the future — in the present, they don't have their feet on the ground. Their attitude is deplorable and because their fanaticism is devoid of content, they are without real links with this future which they dream about."

Sverdlov was wearing a malicious smile and, turning to me, he said: "You can't dispute that Vladimir Ilyich's comments are just."

Lenin hastened to add: "Do the anarchists ever recognise their lack of realism in present-day life? Why, they don't even think of it."

Responding to this, I told Lenin and Sverdlov that I was a semi-literate peasant and could not dispute in a proper manner the learned opinion which Lenin had expressed about the anarchists.

"But I must tell you, comrade Lenin, that your assertion that the anarchists don't understand 'the present' realistically, that they have no real connection with it and so forth, is fundamentally mistaken. The anarchist-communists in the Ukraine (or the 'South of Russia' to you communist-bolsheviks who try to avoid the word Ukraine), the anarchist-communists, I say, have already given many proofs that they are firmly planted in 'the present'. The whole struggle of the revolutionary Ukrainian countryside against the Central Rada has been carried out under the ideological guidance of the anarchist-communists and also in part by the Socialist Revolutionaries (who, of course, have entirely different aims from the anarchist-communists in their struggle

against the Central Rada). Your Bolsheviks have scarcely any presence in our villages. Where they have penetrated, their influence is minimal. Almost all the communes or peasant associations in the Ukraine were formed at the instigation of the anarchist-communists. The armed struggle of the working people against the counter-revolution in general and the Austro-German invasion in particular has been undertaken with the ideological and organic guidance of the anarchist-communists exclusively.

“Certainly it is not in your party’s interest to give us credit for all this, but these are the facts and you can’t dispute them. You know perfectly well, I assume, the effective force and the fighting capacity of the free, revolutionary forces of the Ukraine. It is not without reason that you have evoked the courage with which they have heroically defended the common revolutionary conquests. Among them, at least one half have fought under the anarchist banner – Mokrousov, Maria Nikiforova<sup>25</sup>, Tchederedniak, Garin, Lounev and many other commanders of troops loyal to the Revolution whom it would take too long to mention – all these are anarchist-communists. I could talk about the group to which I belong myself and all the other partisan groups and ‘battalions of volunteers’ for the defence of the Revolution which we formed and which were indispensable to the Red Guard command.

“All this shows how mistaken you are, comrade Lenin, in alleging that we, the anarchist-communists, don’t have our feet on the ground, that our attitude towards ‘the present’ is deplorable and that we are too fond of dreaming about the future. What I have said to you in the course of this interview cannot be questioned because it is the truth. The account which I have made to you contradicts the conclusions you expressed about us. Everyone can see we are firmly planted in ‘the present’, that we are working and searching for the means to bring about the future we desire, and that we are in fact dealing very seriously with this problem.”

At this moment I looked at Sverdlov. He turned red but continued smiling. As for Lenin, spreading his arms, he said: “Perhaps I am mistaken.”

“Yes, yes, in this case, comrade Lenin, you have been too hard on us, the anarchist-communists, simply, I believe, because you are poorly informed about the real situation in the Ukraine and the role we are playing there.”

“Perhaps I don’t dispute it. But anyway mistakes are unavoidable, especially in the current situation,” replied Lenin.

Noticing I had become a little hot under the collar, he did his best to pacify me in a paternal way, diverting the interview very adroitly on to another subject. But my bad character, if I may call it that, would not allow me to interest myself in further discussion, in spite of all the respect Lenin inspired in me. I felt insulted. Although I knew that in front of me was a man with whom there were many other topics to take up and from whom there was much to learn, my state of mind was altered. My answers were no longer as detailed; something in me snapped and I experienced a feeling of revulsion.

Lenin was hard pressed to deal with this change in my attitude. He endeavoured to defuse my anger by speaking of other things. Noticing that I was recovering my former disposition as a result of his eloquence, he asked me suddenly: “So you intend to return to the Ukraine clandestinely?”

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<sup>25</sup> Maria Nikiforova was an anarchist partisan leader whose career closely parallels Makhno’s up to the point of her capture and execution by the Whites in the autumn of 1919. In April 1918 she received a commendation from the Bolshevik general Antonov for her revolutionary activities. Palij, “Anarchism of Nestor Makhno”, pp 87–88.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Can I offer you my assistance?”

“With pleasure,” I said.

Turning to Sverdlov, Lenin asked, “Who is currently in charge of sending our agents into the South?”

“Either comrade Karpenko or comrade Zatonski,” Sverdlov replied. “I’ll have to check.”

While Sverdlov was phoning to find out which one was in charge of sending undercover agents into the Ukraine, Lenin tried to persuade me that the position of the Communist Party in regarding the anarchists was not so hostile as I seemed to think.

“If we have been obliged,” Lenin said, “to take energetic measures to dislodge the anarchists from the particular building they were occupying in the Malaia Dimitrovska, in which they were harbouring bandits from here or elsewhere, the responsibility doesn’t fall on us but on the anarchists who installed themselves there. You must understand they were authorised to occupy another building not far from the Malaia Dmitrovka and they are free to carry on their work in their own way.”

“Do you have any evidence,” I asked Lenin, “proving that the anarchists of the Malaia Dmitrovska were harbouring bandits?”

“Yes, the Extraordinary Commission<sup>26</sup> collected and verified it. Otherwise our party would not have authorised the measures taken,” Lenin replied.

Meanwhile Sverdlov had sat down with us again and announced that comrade Karpenko was in charge of passing secret agents, but that comrade Zatonski was also well-informed in this matter.

Lenin exclaimed immediately: “So, comrade, go tomorrow afternoon or whenever to comrade Karpenko and ask him for anything you need to enter the Ukraine clandestinely. He will give you a route to follow to cross the frontier.”

“What frontier?” I asked.

“Aren’t you up to date? A frontier has been set up between Russia and the Ukraine.<sup>27</sup> There are German troops guarding it,” Lenin said irritably.

“Yet you consider the Ukraine as ‘the South of Russia’,” I replied.

“To consider is one thing, comrade, and to see things as they are is another,” retorted Lenin.

Before I had time to make a rejoinder, he added: “You tell comrade Karpenko that I sent you. If he doesn’t believe it, he has only to phone me. Here’s the address where you can find him.”

Then we all stood up, shook hands, and after exchanging thanks, apparently cordial, I left Lenin’s office, forgetting even to remind Sverdlov to order his secretary to make the necessary note on my documents which would entitle me to a free room from the Moscow Soviet.

I quickly found myself at the gate of the Kremlin and immediately set off to see comrade Burtsev.

### Translator’s Epilogue

Thanks to Lenin’s assistance, Makhno was able to return to the Ukraine after a long and dangerous journey. The Bolsheviks provided him with the passport of a schoolteacher; they also tried to recruit him as one of their agents in the Ukraine, but he refused their offer. Arriving at

<sup>26</sup> Better known as the Cheka. According to the head of this organ, Felix Dzerzhinsky, “Simultaneously with the disarmament of the anarchists, crime in Moscow decreased 80 per cent.” Quoted in Palij, same place, p.63.

<sup>27</sup> On June 12 1919 the Bolsheviks signed an armistice with the Hetman’s government, which involved recognition of the Ukrainian state. Same place, p.37.

his native Gulai-Polye, Makhno learned that in his absence his mother's house had been burned to the ground and his older brother, a war invalid, murdered by the forces of reaction.<sup>28</sup>

There is little evidence that Makhno's interview with Sverdlov and Lenin were of any historical significance. The Bolsheviks continued to pursue an unenlightened policy towards the Ukraine. Completely misjudging their strength in the countryside, they called for a mass uprising on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1918, which resulted in a fiasco.<sup>29</sup> And when they invaded the Ukraine for the second time at the end of 1918 they repeated all the same mistakes in their dealings with the peasants with all the same results.<sup>30</sup> Ironically, Makhno's ideas on waging a 'people's war' in the countryside were eventually to be emulated (unwittingly) by Marxist-Leninist leaders in the Third World – for very different ends.

Makhno went on to organise the movement which bears his name, the Makhnovschins, which struggled for three years to establish an anarchist society in the south-eastern Ukraine. From a purely military point of view, Makhno's partisan army had a great deal to do with the outcome of the Civil War: many of the anarchist militants gave their lives in a desperate battle with the armies of the 'White' General Deniken and succeeded in cutting his supply lines just as his forces were closing in on Moscow.

Lenin and Trotsky followed Makhno's activities with the greatest interest.<sup>31</sup> At one point they even considered ceding part of the Ukraine to the anarchists to carry out their social experiment.<sup>32</sup> But in the end the Makhnovschina was drowned in the blood of thousands of executed peasants.<sup>33</sup>

When Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman visited Lenin in 1920 to plead the case of anarchists in Russian prisons, Lenin expostulated: "Anarchists? Nonsense! We do have bandits in prison, and Makhnovites, but no ideological anarchists."<sup>34</sup>

Retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020 from <http://www.nestormakhno.info/english/kremind.htm>

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Arshinov, "History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918–1921" (Detroit, 1974) p.54.

<sup>29</sup> Adams, "The Great Ukrainian Jacquerie", in Hunczak, mentioned before, p.254.

<sup>30</sup> Arthur E. Adams, "Bolsheviks in the Ukraine: The Second Campaign 1918–1919" (New Haven, 1963)

<sup>31</sup> M. Malet, "Makhno and his Enemies", META Vol.1, p.14.

<sup>32</sup> Victor Serge, "Memoirs of a Revolutionary" (London 1963) p.119.

<sup>33</sup> G.P. Maximoff, "The Guillotine at Work" (Chicago 1940), chap.7.

<sup>34</sup> Emma Goldman, "Living My Life" (Garden City NY 1931) p.765

# **The Russian Revolution in Ukraine (March 1917 – April 1918)**

Nestor Makhno

1926

## Dedication

I dedicate this volume to the memory of my dead friends and comrades who struggled with me to organize revolutionary Ukrainian workers to bring about a free, anarchist communist society:

Peter Gavrilenko, Alexander Kalashnikov, Moise Kalinichenko, Simon Karetnik, Philip Krat, Isidor (Peter) Lyutyi, Alexis Marchenko, Savva Makhno, Andrei Semenyuta, Gabriel Troyan, Stepan Shepel, Boris Veretelnik, Kh. Gorelik, Pavel Korostilev (Khundai), Luc Panchenko, Abram Shnayder, and others.

They perished under various circumstances but always in pursuit of the same goal: the realization and putting into practice of the concepts of liberty, equality, and free labour.

Nestor Makhno

## Preface

On the occasion of publishing the initial volume of “The Russian Revolution in Ukraine” I find it necessary to add a few words of explanation.

In the first place, I must advise the reader that this work lacks a number of important documents: the resolutions and proclamations of the Gulyai-Pole Union of Peasants, the Soviet of Workers’ and Peasants’ Delegates, and their ideological driving force – the Gulyai Pole Peasant Anarcho-Communist Group.

The Anarcho-Communist Group struggled to unite the peasants and workers of the Gulyai-Pole region under its own banners. Always in the vanguard of the revolutionary movement, the Anarcho-Communist Group explained to the peasants and workers the significance of unfolding events, clarifying the goals of the workers in general as well as the aims of the anarcho-communist movement which in spirit most closely approaches the peasant mentality.

Secondly, this volume lacks photographs of the members of the Gulyai-Pole Peasant Group of Anarcho-Communists, which, accompanied by brief biographical notes, would have occupied the first place in this volume. This group formed an essential part of the Russian Revolution in Ukraine and was the guiding force of the movement to which it gave rise, the “Revolutionary *Makhnovshchina*”. The theory and practice of this movement lead to a whole range of very important issues which I am trying to present to the workers of the world for discussion.

How fitting it would have been to publish photographs of these revolutionaries, who, emerging from the depths of the toiling masses and under my ideological and organizational guidance, created a powerful anti-statist revolutionary movement of the broad masses of Ukrainian workers. As is well known, this movement identified itself with the black banners of the Revolutionary *Makhnovshchina*.

To my great sorrow, no possibility now exists of obtaining photographs of these unknown peasant revolutionaries...

This work is an historically accurate account of the Russian Revolution in general and our role in it in particular. My version could only be disputed by those “experts” who, while not taking any effective part in revolutionary events and in fact left behind by those events, have nevertheless succeeded in passing themselves off to revolutionaries of other countries as people with a profound and detailed knowledge of the Russian Revolution. The objections of such experts can be attributed to their failure to understand what it is they are criticizing.

I have one regret concerning the present work — that it is not being published in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian language. Culturally the Ukrainian people are moving forward to the full realization of their unique qualities and this work could have played a role in that development. But if I cannot publish my work in the language of my own country, the fault is not mine but is due to the conditions in which I find myself.

Nestor Makhno, 1926

P.S. I must express my deep comradely appreciation to the French comrade Eugene Wentzel who has rendered me invaluable assistance, allowing me to find the time to edit my notes and prepare the present volume for publication.

# **Part I**

# Chapter 1: My Liberation

The February Revolution of 1917 opened the gates of all Russian prisons for political prisoners. There can be no doubt this was mainly brought about by armed workers and peasants taking to the streets, some in their blue smocks, others in grey military overcoats.

These revolutionary workers demanded an immediate amnesty as the first conquest of the Revolution. They made this demand to the state-socialists who, together with bourgeois liberals, had formed the Provisional “Revolutionary” Government with the intention of submitting revolutionary events to their own wisdom. The Socialist-Revolutionary A. Kerensky, the Minister of Justice, rapidly acceded to this demand of the workers. In a matter of days, all political prisoners were released from prison and were able to devote themselves to vital work among the workers and peasants, work which they had started during the difficult years of underground activity.

The tsarist government of Russia, based on the landowning aristocracy, had walled up these political prisoners in damp dungeons with the aim of depriving the labouring classes of their advanced elements and destroying their means of denouncing the iniquities of the regime. Now these workers and peasants, fighters against the aristocracy, again found themselves free. And I was one of them.

The eight years and eight months I spent in prison, during which I was shackled hand and foot (as a “lifer”) and suffered from a serious illness, failed to shake my belief in the soundness of anarchism. For me anarchism meant the struggle against the State as a form of organizing social life and as a form of power over this social life. On the contrary, in many ways my term in prison helped to strengthen and develop my convictions. Because of them I had been seized by the authorities and locked up “for life” in prison.

Convinced that liberty, free labour, equality, and solidarity will triumph over slavery under the yoke of State and Capital, I emerged from the gates of Butyrki Prison on March 2, 1917. Inspired by these convictions, three days after my release I threw myself into the activities of the Lefortovo Anarchist Group right there in Moscow. But not for a moment did I cease to think about the work of our Gulyai-Pole group of peasant anarcho-communists. As I learned through friends, the work of this group, started over a decade earlier, was still on-going despite the overwhelming loss of its leading members.

One thing oppressed me — my lack of the necessary education and practical preparation in the area of the social and political problems of anarchism. I felt this deficiency deeply. But even more deeply I recognized that nine out of ten of my fellow-anarchists were lacking in the necessary preparation for our work. The source of this harmful situation I found in the failure to establish our own school, despite our frequent plans for such a project. Only the hope that this state of affairs would not endure encouraged and endowed me with energy, for I believed the everyday work of anarchists in the intense revolutionary situation would inevitably lead them to a realization of the necessity of creating their own revolutionary organization and building up its strength. Such an organization would be capable of gathering all the available forces of anarchism to create a movement which could act in a conscious and coherent manner. The enor-

mous growth of the Russian Revolution immediately suggested to me the unshakable notion that anarchist activity at such a time must be inseparably connected with the labouring masses. These masses were the element of society most dedicated to the triumph of liberty and justice, to the winning of new victories, and to the creation of a new communal social structure and new human relationships.

Such were my cherished thoughts about the development of the anarchist movement in the Russian Revolution and the ideological influence of this movement on revolutionary events.

With these convictions I returned to Gulyai-Pole three weeks after my release from prison. Gulyai-Pole was my home town where there were many people and things close to my mind and heart. There I could do something useful among the peasants. Our group was founded there among the peasants and there it still survived despite losing two-thirds of its members. Some were killed in shoot-outs, others on the scaffold. Some disappeared into far-off, icy Siberia while others were forced into exile abroad. The entire central core of the group had almost entirely been wiped out. But the ideas of the group had struck deep roots in Gulyai-Pole and even beyond.

The greatest concentration of will-power and a profound knowledge of the goals of anarchism are necessary in order to decide what it is possible to gain from an unfolding political revolution.

It is there in Gulyai-Pole, in the heart of the labouring peasantry, that will arise that powerful revolutionary force — the self-activity of the masses — on which revolutionary anarchism must be based according to Bakunin, Kropotkin, and a host of other theoreticians of anarchism. This force will show to the oppressed class the ways and means of destroying the old regime of slavery and replacing it with a new world in which slavery has disappeared and authority will no longer have a place. Liberty, equality, and solidarity will then be the principles which will guide individuals and human societies in their lives and struggles, and in their quest for new ideas and equitable relations between people.

These ideas sustained me through the long years of suffering in prison and now I carried them back with me to Gulyai-Pole.

## Chapter 2: Meeting with comrades and first attempts to organize revolutionary activities

Upon arrival in Gulyai-Pole, I immediately got together with my comrades from the anarchist group. Many of my former comrades had perished. Those who survived from the old days were: Andrei Semenyuta (the brother of Sasha and Prokofii Semenyuta), Moisei Kalinichenko, Filipp Krat, Savva Makhno, the brothers Prokofii and Grigorii Sharovsky, Pavel Korostelev, Lev Schneider, Pavel Sokruta, Isidor Liutii, Aleksei Marchenko, and Pavel Khundei (Korostilev). Together with these comrades came a younger bunch who had not yet joined the group in my time. But now they had been members for two or three years and were busy reading anarchist literature which they distributed to the peasants. Throughout the whole period of underground activity the group had continued to publish leaflets, printed by hectograph.

And how about the peasants and workers, sympathizing with anarchist ideals, who came to visit me? It would be impossible to list them. At that time they really didn't figure in the plans I was devising for the future work of our group.

I saw before me my own peasant friends — unknown revolutionary anarchist fighters who in their own lives didn't know what it means to cheat one another. They were pure peasant types, tough to convince, but once convinced, once they had grasped an idea and tested it against their own reasoning, why then they pushed that idea at every conceivable opportunity. Truly, seeing these people before me I trembled with joy and was overcome with emotion. I immediately decided to start the very next day to carry out active propaganda among the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Pole. I wanted to dissolve the Public Committee (the local organ of the Provisional Government) and the militia, and prevent the formation of any more committees. I decided to take up anarchist action as the first order of business.

The visits from the peasants, both men and women, went on continually for a day and a half. Finally, on March 25, these visitors, who had come to meet "the one who rose from the dead" as they expressed it, began to disperse. The members of our group hastily set up a meeting to discuss practical affairs. By this time my enthusiasm for rushing into action had cooled off considerably. In my report I down played for the time being the carrying on of propaganda work among the peasants and workers and the overthrow of the Public Committee. Indeed I surprised my comrades by insisting that we as a group reach a clear understanding of the state of the anarchist movement generally in Russia. The fragmentation of anarchist groups, a phenomenon well-known to me before the Revolution, was a source of dissatisfaction for me personally. I could never be happy with such a situation.

"It is necessary," I said, "to organize the forces of the workers on a scale which can adequately express the revolutionary enthusiasm of the labouring masses when the Revolution is going through its destructive phase. And if the anarchists continue to act in an uncoordinated way, one of two things will happen: either they will lose

touch with events and restrict themselves to sectarian propaganda; or they will trail along in the tail-end of these events, carrying out tasks for the benefit of their political enemies.

Here in Gulyai-Pole and the surrounding region we should act decisively to dissolve government institutions and absolutely put an end to private property in land, factories, plants, and other types of enterprises. To accomplish this we must keep in close contact with the peasant masses, assuring ourselves of the steadfastness of their revolutionary enthusiasm. We must convince the peasants we are fighting for them and are unwaveringly devoted to those concepts which we will present to them at the village assemblies and other meetings. And while this is going on we must keep an eye of what is happening with our movement in the cities.

This, comrades, is one of those tactical questions which we shall decide tomorrow. It seems to me it deserves to be thoroughly discussed because the type of action to be engaged in by our group depends on the correct resolution of this question.

For us, natives of Gulyai-Pole, this plan of action is all the more important as we are the only group of anarcho-communists which has kept in touch with the peasants continuously over the last 11 years. We know of no other groups in the vicinity. In the closest cities, Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, the former anarchist groups were virtually wiped out. The few survivors are far away. Some of the Ekaterinoslav anarchists stayed in Moscow. We don't know when they will return. And we still haven't heard anything about those who emigrated to Sweden, France, or America.

At the present time we can depend only on ourselves. No matter how weak we are in our knowledge of the theory of anarchism, we are compelled to work out an immediate plan of action to be undertaken among the peasants of this region. Without any hesitation we must begin work on organizing the Peasants' Union. And we must see to it that one of the peasants from our group is at the head of this Union. This is important for two reasons: first, we can prevent any political group hostile to our ideals from infiltrating the Union; and secondly, by being able to address meetings of the Union at any time on current issues, we shall be creating a close bond between our group and the Peasants' Union. This will give the peasants a chance to deal with the land question themselves. They can go ahead and declare the land public property without waiting for the "revolutionary" government to decide this question which is so crucial for the peasants."

The comrades were pleased with my report but were far from agreeing with my approach to the whole matter. Comrade Kalinichenko sharply criticized this approach, advocating that our role as anarchists in the current revolution should be restricted to publicizing our ideas. He noted that since we could now act openly, we should make use of this situation to explain our ideas to the workers, without involving ourselves in unions or other organizations.

"This will show the peasants," he said, "that we are not interested in dominating them but only in giving them advice. Then they will look seriously at our ideas and, embracing our methods, they will independently begin to build a new life."

At this juncture we concluded our meeting. It was 7 a.m. I wanted to attend the general meeting of peasants and workers at which the chairman of the Public Committee, Prusinsky, would read the proclamation of the district commissar, giving the official version of the revolutionary upheaval in the country.

For the time being we decided simply to review my report and submit it to further analysis and discussion. Some of the comrades dispersed, others remained with me in order to attend the general meeting together.

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At 10:00 a.m. my comrades and I were at the central marketplace; I viewed the square, the residential buildings and schools. I went into one of the schools, met the principal, and spoke with him at length about the program of instruction, something, incidentally, I knew nothing about. According to the principal, the catechism was part of this program and was zealously defended by the priests and, to some extent, by the parents of the students. I was quite upset. Nevertheless, this did not prevent me, some time later, from becoming a member of the Education Society which subsidized this particular school. I firmly believed that by direct participation in this society, I could undermine the religious bases of education...

Towards noon I arrived at the general meeting which had just started with the report of the chairman of the Public Committee, Ensign Prusinsky. (At that time in Gulyai-Pole was stationed the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Serbian Army, to which was attached a Russian machine gun unit with 12 machine guns and a complement of 144 men, led by four officers. During the organization of the Public Committee in Gulyai-Pole some of these officers were invited to take part. One of them, namely Prusinsky, was elected chairman of the Public Committee. Another, Lieutenant Kudinov, was elected Chief of the Militia. These two officers, these "public figures", determined the ordering of social life in Gulyai-Pole.)

At the conclusion of his report, the chairman of the Public Committee asked me to address the Council in support of his views. This I refused to do and instead asked to speak on another matter.

In my speech I pointed out to the peasants the absurdity of allowing in revolutionary Gulyai-Pole such a Public Committee, headed by people who were strangers to the community and who were not accountable to the community for their actions. And I proposed that the assembly immediately delegate four people from each *sotnia* (Gulyai-Pole was divided into seven wards, called *sotnias*) to hold a special conference about this and other questions.

The elementary school teachers at the meeting immediately rallied to my position. The principal of one small school, Korpusenko, offered his building for our meeting.

It was decided that delegates should be elected at separate meetings of the *sotnias* and a day was fixed for the meetings. Thus ended my first public appearance after getting out of prison.

Now the teachers invited me to their own meeting. First I got to know them a little better. One of them turned out to be a Socialist-Revolutionary; the remaining 12 or 14 people were mostly non-Party.

Then we discussed a series of questions related to the inactivity of the teachers. They wanted to take part in public life and were searching for ways of doing this. We decided to act in concert on behalf of the peasants and workers to displace the officer-kulak Committee. This Committee had not been elected by the whole of society but only by its wealthiest elements.

After this I went to a meeting of our whole group.

Here we analyzed my report and Kalenichenko's criticism of it. As a result, we decided to begin methodical propaganda work in the sotnias: among the peasants, and in the mills and workshops. This agitation work was to be based on two premises:

1. So long as the peasants and workers found themselves in a disorganized state, they would not be able to constitute themselves as a regional social force of anti-authoritarian character, capable of struggling against the "Public Committee". Up to this point the peasants and workers, whether they liked it or not, had been obliged to adhere to the "Public Committee", organized under the auspices of the Provisional Coalition Government. That is why it was important to re-elect this Committee in Gulyai-Pole.
2. Sustained agitation must be carried out for the organization of a Peasants' Union, which we would take part in and in which we would exercise the dominant influence. We would express our lack of confidence in the "Public Committee", an organ of the central government, and urge the Peasants' Union to take over this organ.

"This tactic," I told the comrades, "I see leading to the repudiation of government rule with its concept of this type of Public Committee. Moreover, if we are successful in our efforts, we shall help the peasants and workers to realize a fundamental truth. Namely that once they take a conscious and serious approach to the question of revolution, then they themselves will become the true bearers of the concept of self-management. And they won't need the guidance of political parties with their servant — the State.

The time is very favourable for us, anarchists, to strive for a practical solution to a whole range of problems of the present and the future, even if there are great difficulties and the possibility of frequent mistakes. These problems are connected in one way or another with our ideal and by struggling for our demands we shall become the true bearers of the free society. We can't let this opportunity pass by. That would be an unforgivable error for our group, for we would become separated from the labouring masses.

At all costs we must beware of losing touch with the workers. This is equivalent to political death for revolutionaries. Or even worse, we could force the workers to reject our ideas, ideas which attract them now and will continue to attract them so long as we are among them, marching, fighting, and dying, or winning and rejoicing."

The comrades, smiling ironically, replied: "Old buddy, you are deviating from the normal Anarchist tactic. We should be listening to the voice of our movement, as you yourself called upon us to do at our first meeting."

"You are quite right, we must and we shall listen to the voice of our movement, if there is a movement. At present I don't see it. But I know we must work now, without delay. I proposed a plan of work and we have already adopted it. What else remains to do, except work?"

Well, a whole week was spent in discussions. Nevertheless, all of us had already started work in our chosen fields, in accordance with the decision we had agreed to.

# Chapter 3: Organization of the Peasants' Union

About the middle of the week, the elected delegates gathered at the school to discuss the re-election of the Public Committee.

For this meeting I, along with some of the teachers, had prepared a general report which the teacher Korpusenko was chosen to read.

This report was well-conceived and well-written.

The elected peasant delegates consulted with the delegates from the factory workers and jointly passed a resolution demanding the re-election of the "Public Committee". At the insistence of the teachers Lebedev and Korpusenko, I contributed some words of introduction to this resolution.

The delegates returned to their own electors and discussed the resolution with them. When the resolution had been confirmed by the electors, a date was set for new elections.

Meanwhile the members of our group were preparing the peasants for the organization of the Peasants' Union.

During this period an agent arrived from the District Committee of the Peasants' Union, formed from the ranks of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. This was Comrade Krylov-Martynov, who was charged with organizing a committee of the Peasants' Union in Gulyai-Pole.

As a former political prisoner, he was interested in my life history, so we met and went to my place to drink tea and talk. And he ended up staying there till the next day.

Meanwhile I had asked the members of our group to prepare the peasants for a general assembly on the next day to deal with the found of the Peasants' Union.

The SR Krylov-Martynov was an effective orator. He described in glowing terms to the peasants the impending struggle of the Socialist-Revolutionaries for the transfer of land to the peasants without compensation. This struggle was to take place in the Constituent Assembly, expected to be convened in the near future. For this struggle the support of the peasants was required. He appealed to them to organize themselves into a Peasants' Union and support the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

This provided an opening for me and several other members of our group to intervene. I said:

"We, the Anarchists, agree with the Socialist-Revolutionaries on the necessity of the peasants organizing themselves into a Peasants' Union. But not for the purpose of support the SRs in their future oratorical struggle with the social-democrats and kadets in the contemplated Constitutional Struggle (if indeed it ever comes to be).

From the revolutionary Anarchist point of view, the organization of the Peasants' Union is necessary so the peasants can make the maximum contribution of their vital energies to the revolutionary current. In doing so they will leave their stamp upon the Revolution and determine its concrete results.

These results, for the labouring peasantry, will logically turn out as follows. At present the power of Capital and its creature — its system of organized thuggery — the State — is based on the forced labour and artificially-subjugated intelligence of the labouring masses. But now the labouring masses of the countryside and the cities can struggle to create their own lives and their own freedom. And they can manage this without the leadership of political parties with their proposed debates in the Constituent Assembly.

The labouring peasants and workers shouldn't even be thinking about the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly is their enemy. It would be criminal on the part of the workers to expect from it their own freedom and happiness.

The Constituent Assembly is a gambling casino run by political parties. Ask anyone who hangs around such places if it is possible to visit them without being deceived! It's impossible.

The working class — the peasantry and the workers — will inevitably be deceived if they send their own representatives to the Constituent Assembly.

Now is not the time for the labouring peasantry to be thinking about the Constituent Assembly and about organizing support for political parties, including the Socialist-Revolutionaries. No! The peasants and the workers are facing more serious problems. They should prepare to transform all the land, factories, and workshops into communal property as the basis on which they will build a new life.

The Gulyai-Pole Peasants' Union, which we are proposing to found at this meeting, will be the first step in this direction..."

The SR agent of the District Party Committee of the Peasants' Union was not perturbed by our intervention. In fact he agreed with us. And so on March 28–29, 1917, was founded the Gulyai-Pole Peasants' Union.

The Executive Committee of the Union was composed of 28 members, all peasants, including myself, in spite of my asking the peasants not to nominate me as a candidate. For I was busy opening an office for our group and editing its Statement of Principles.

The peasants honoured my request by nominating me in four sotnias in each of which I was elected unanimously. Thus the Executive Committee of the Peasants' Union was elected.

The peasants proceeded to choose me as chairman of the Executive Committee.

The registration of members in the Union was begun. In the space of four or five days all the peasants joined, with the exception, naturally, of land-owning proprietors. These defenders of private property in land had isolated themselves from the labouring masses. They hoped to form a separate group, including the most ignorant of their own hired hands. In this way they hoped to hold out until the Constituent Assembly was convened, at which point they could prevail with the help of the Social-Democrats (at that time still vigorously maintaining the right to private ownership of land).

Admittedly, the labour peasantry had no need of such friends as the landed proprietors. Indeed they were regarded as the mortal enemies of the labouring peasants, who realized that only the forcible expropriation of their land and its transformation into communal property would render them harmless.

Unshakably convinced of this idea, which they freely expressed among themselves, the labouring peasantry thus passed judgement in advance on the Constituent Assembly.

So the Gulyai-Pole Peasants' Union was organized. But the Union as yet had not absorbed the whole labouring peasantry of Gulyai-Pole *raion*, which included a number of settlements and villages. Therefore the Union could not act in a sufficiently decisive fashion to exert an influence on other raions, and to carry out the organized revolutionary work of dispossessing the proprietors of their land and distributing it for the general use of the community.

So I left Gulyai-Pole, along with the secretary of the Executive Committee of the Union in order to make a tour of the raion, establishing Peasant Unions in these settlements and villages.

Upon my return, I reported to my group about our successes, emphasizing the evident revolutionary mood of the peasants, which we were obliged to support with all the means at our disposal, while directing it carefully but firmly towards the anti-authoritarian mode of action.

In our group there was much rejoicing and each member told me about his own work on our project, what sort of impression our work was producing on the peasants, etc.

The secretary of our group, Comrade Krat, who had filled in for me during my absence, told about the arrival in Gulyai-Pole of new agitators from Aleksandrovsk. They had delivered speeches in favour of the War and the Constituent Assembly and had tried to get their resolutions accepted. But the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Pole rejected these resolutions, declaring to the agitators that they were in the process of organizing themselves and were in no position to accept resolutions from outside.... .

Each of us was cheered by these encouraging signs, inspiring us to tireless revolutionary activity.... .

## Chapter 4: Examination of the police files

At about this time, the leaders of the Gulyai-Pole Militia, Lieutenant Kudinov and his secretary, the inveterate Kadet A. Rambievski, invited me to help them sift through the files of the Gulyai-Pole police administration.

Since I attached great significance to these files, I asked our group to appoint another comrade to join me. I considered this matter so important that I was prepared to temporarily set aside all other work.

Some of the comrades, Kalinichenko and Krat in particular, scoffed at the idea of my wanting to help the Militia bosses. Only after a lively discussion did Comrade Kalinichenko acknowledge what had to be done and agree to accompany me to examine the files.

There was a document about Petr Sharovsky, a former member of our group, attesting that he had performed great services as a secret agent of the police....

I took all the documents with me to the group. Unfortunately, most of the people implicated by the files had been killed in the War. The only survivors were Sopliak and P. Sharovsky, along with Constables Osnishchenko and Bugayev. The last two liked to disguise themselves in civilian clothes during their off-duty hours and go snooping around the homes of people suspected of political activities.

We made a note of these survivors but considered it inappropriate to kill them at the present time. Anyway, three of them (Sopliak, Sharovsky, and Bugayev) were not in Gulyai-Pole; they had made themselves scarce shortly after my arrival.

The document about Petr Sharovsky, proving his betrayal of Aleksandr Semenyuta and Marfe Piven to the police, was publicized by me at a general meeting.

But the documents about the other three were kept secret for the time being. We hoped they would show themselves in Gulyai-Pole sooner or later and we would be able to seize them without too much difficulty. The former constable Nazar Onishchenko was now living in Gulyai-Pole but never showed himself at councils or meetings. After the Revolution had disbanded the police, he was called up for military service by the new government, but soon contrived to leave the Front and return home.

Shortly after the documents about Sharovsky were publicized, I ran into Nazar Onishchenko right in the middle of town. This was the policeman and secret agent who had once searched my room. He had also permitted himself to search my mother, and when she protested, he slapped her. Now this scoundrel, who was so corrupt he had once turned in his own brother for the reward, rushed up to me in the street and, snatching off his cap, cried: "Nestor Ivanovich! How do you do!" And he extended his hand.

How awful! What a loathing this Judas aroused in me just with his voice, his facial expression, his mannerisms! I began to tremble with rage and screamed at him: "Get away from me, scoundrel, before I put a bullet in you!"

He recoiled and his face turned white as snow.

Without even thinking, I reached in my pocket and nervously fingered my revolver. Should I kill this dog here, or would it be better to wait?

Reason won out over fury and the thirst for revenge. Overcome by my agitation, I made my way to a nearby store and collapsed into a chair at the entrance.

The owner of the store, a shop where flour was sold, greeted me and tried to ask me something but I didn't understand him. I apologized for sitting in his chair and asked him to leave me alone. Ten minutes later I asked a peasant passing by to help me get to the Executive Committee of the Peasants' Union.

The members of our group and the Executive Committee of the Peasants' Union learned about my encounter with Onishchenko. They insisted on publicizing the document which incriminated him as an agent of the secret police. (That he had been an ordinary policeman was of course well-known to the peasants and workers. He had arrested and beaten up many of them.)

All of the comrades spoke in favour of making public this document, to be followed by Onishchenko's execution.

I objected, entreating the comrades to leave him alone for the time being. I noted there were more important secret agents, Sopliak, for example, who had been a specialist in undercover work, according to the available documents. He had worked for a long time in Gulyai-Pole, as well as in Pologi, among the workers at the depot. He had taken part in the manhunt for Comrade Semenyuta.

Bugayev was also an accomplished undercover agent, an expert at disguise. He would go wherever peasants and workers were gathered with his tray of bagels and seltzer water, passing himself off as a pedlar. He was especially active during the period when the Tsarist government had put up a 2,000 rouble reward on the head of Aleksandr Semenyuta. More than once this Bugayev had disguised himself, together with Police Chief Karachentz and Nazar Onishchenko, and the three of them disappeared for whole weeks. Abandoning their official posts, they drifted about the raion of Gulyai-Pole, or the workers' quarters of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav. Chief Karachentz was killed by Comrade Semenyuta at the Gulyai-Pole theatre. Bugayev, Sopliak, and Sharovsky were still alive and hiding somewhere not far away.

That's why we couldn't touch Onishchenko. We had to fortify ourselves with patience and try to get our hands on the others. According to information from the peasants, they occasionally showed themselves in Gulyai-Pole. Therefore I asked the comrades to leave Onishchenko in peace, in the hopes we could seize all these scoundrels and kill them, because such people are pernicious for any human society. I told the comrades, "These people can't be rehabilitated because they have committed the worst of crimes: *they sold themselves for money and they betrayed their friends*. A revolution must annihilate them. A free society where there is complete equality has no need of traitors. They must all perish, either by their own hands or by the hands of the revolutionary vanguard."

All my friends and comrades now refrained from their insistence that Onishchenko be immediately exposed as the perpetrator of the worst of crimes.

## **Chapter 5: Re-election of the public committee; whether or not to get involved in it**

Our group occupied itself for a time with internal matters, giving some structure to the organization and distributing tasks among our members, strong in numbers but weak intellectually (we now had over 80 members). One of these tasks was taking out subscriptions to all the Anarchist newspapers being published in Russia and Ukraine. During this period the re-election of the Public Committee was begun.

Along with some other comrades from our group, I was nominated again by the peasants and was elected.

This was the situation. Some of the peasants abstained from voting. The ones who did take part in the election for the most part voted for members of our group or for people sympathetic to us. In spite of the entreaties of my electors, I refused to represent them on the Public Committee. I did not do so from principle, for I was not aware of what position the anarchists of the cities might have taken on this question of whether or not to take part in such institutions if elected. I had made an inquiry through the secretary of the Federation of Moscow Anarchists but did not receive a reply in time. Rather I refused for a more important reason: my entry into the Public Committee via the usual formal election process would be counterproductive to all my plans, which were geared towards attenuating the power of these committees with their governmental form and functions, while building alternatives with our Group and the peasants.

These plans had been adopted by our group and because of them I had accepted the chairmanship of the Executive Committee of the Peasants' Union.

These plans of mine had been designed with several aims in mind:

1. To create the closest bonds between our group and the whole labouring peasantry on the basis of practical work for the Revolution.
2. To forestall the infiltration of the peasantry by political parties. The peasants must be convinced of the danger inherent in political parties. They might be revolutionary at a given moment, but, if they succeed in dominating the will of the peasantry, then they will destroy its creative initiative for revolutionary self-activity.
3. To convince the labouring peasantry of the absolute necessity of acting without delay to seize control of the "Public Committee", a non-revolutionary organism acting under the orders of the central government. This step was necessary so that we could receive ongoing and timely information about the actions of the Provisional Government. Otherwise we could find ourselves at a critical juncture in total political confusion, without accurate and specific reports about the development of revolutionary events in the cities.

4. To explain to the labouring peasants that the matter of the greatest urgency to them — the conquest of the land and the right to free self-government — must be achieved by them alone. They must not depend on any outside leadership but must rely on their own resources. They must strive to take advantage of the present stage of the Revolution: the new government is in disarray and the political parties are fighting among themselves for power. Now is the time to bring to reality their own revolutionary-anarchist goals.

This principles inspired the plan of action which I had presented to the group of comrades upon my arrival from Moscow. I had nagged, implored, and persuaded the comrades to accept my plans as the basis of our future program of action among the labouring peasantry. Because of these principles I decided to abandon many tactical positions adopted by the anarchist group of the 1906–1907 period. At that time the anarchists were less interested in mass organizational work than in preserving their own exclusiveness. Isolated in their own circles and groups, they developed abnormally and became mentally sluggish through lack of involvement in practical work. Thus they lost the possibility of intervening effectively at times of popular uprisings and revolution.

My plans were totally accepted by our group of anarcho-communists. Through our activities these plans, refined and corrected, eventually embraced an overwhelming majority of the peasants of Gulyai-Pole. In fact this required several months. We shall describe in detail the activities of our Group, which participated fully in the successive phases of the Revolution.

## Chapter 6: The role of teachers. Our work in the public committee

Earlier I said the elementary school teachers of Gulyai-Pole had supported us from the time of my first speech before the assembly of peasants and workers. But I neglected to mention what this support was based on. The teachers agreed with my comment that it was shameful for the working intelligentsia to remain inactive at such a critical moment. The peasantry was experiencing great difficulties due to the lack of participation of the intelligentsia in their movement.

Now the teachers threw themselves into practical work. They took part in the elections to the Public Committee, were nominated and elected. Of the 14 teachers in Gulyai-Pole, six were elected by the peasants.

The peasantry, with the help of the Anarchist Communist Group, took a close look at the services rendered by the intelligentsia to the peasants and workers. They observed that historically the activities of the village teachers could be divided into three phases. Beginning in 1900, the teachers had gone to work with enthusiasm to enlighten the village poor. But the reaction setting in after 1905 put an end of this energetic and high-minded impulse on the part of the teachers. Their work in the villages faltered. Only on the eve of the World War did the teachers stir themselves again, with faith and hope, to renew their work in the backward villages. But the War, this sudden, bloody blow against civilization, deflected them from their task. The teachers as a whole became the most fervent patriots, and their cultural-educational work was directed to the profit of the war-effort...

It's true that only three or four of the Gulyai-Pole teachers passed through each of these stages in their own professional careers. The rest were all young and had not yet experienced such inevitable vicissitudes in their own careers. They all applied themselves sincerely to work with the peasants and workers. Some of them, like A. Korpussenko, G. Belouss, Lebedev, G. Kuzmenko, and Maria Alekseyeva, despite having no experience in practical revolutionary work, made every effort to make themselves useful to the vanguard of peasants and workers. In these early months of the Revolution, the teachers did not aspire to direct the movement of peasants and workers. This fact allowed the teachers to work closely and in harmony with the labouring poor.

At first the peasants regarded the teachers with suspicion. But there came a moment, in the exhilarating rush of events, when everyone was inspired with the spirit of the Revolution and came together in the name of its success. Then the peasants and workers accepted the teachers among themselves. At such a moment the peasants elected teachers to the Public Committee. It was also at this time that the Peasants' Union moved to take control of the Public Committee of Gulyai-Pole. This control was exercised through its own delegation to the Public Committee. I recall the first day we went to the Public Committee, myself and five comrades. We thought our presence would provoke a scandal, that the Committee would not accept a delegation from the Peasants' Union sent to oversee their work. But things turned out just the opposite. We were met with open arms by those members of the Committee noted for their political chicanery –

the representatives of the merchants and shop-owners and those from the Jewish community. These people had got on the Committee to look after their own interests. But now they declared nothing would please them more than friendly collaboration with the peasants in the field of social reconstruction. Up to the moment, it seems, they had not found practical means to convince the peasantry of their disinterested concern. “And now, happily, the peasants themselves have shown the way!” exclaimed one of these slimy characters. So they greeted us, the representatives of the peasants.

Thus six members of the Peasants’ Union were co-opted into the Public Committee. It was essential for them to stand firm in this post, so fraught with danger to the cause of the peasants, and not fall under the influence of ideas inimical to the revolutionary goals of the peasantry. Special vigilance was required of members of the Peasants’ Union who found themselves in institutions such as the Public Committee, which never made a move without orders from the central government or its agents of the S-R or Kadet variety. The peasant delegates had to remain steadfast in their convictions as they were confronted with problems posed to the labouring classes by the developing Revolution, a Revolution which had so far taken shape only in a political sense. With each passing month the actions of the labouring classes were changing the character of the Revolution, liberating it from its initial political framework.

The Peasants’ Union considered the matter of its delegation to the Public Committee very carefully, according to the reports of the Anarchist Communist Group. The mandate of the delegation was formulated as follows: “The Peasants’ Union of Gulyai-Pole, empowering six of its members (N. Makhno, F. Krat, Andrei Semenyuta, P. Korostelyev, G. Sepega, and M. Shramko) to attend all the meetings of the Public Committee and monitor its politics, considers it important that members of the Union control the Land Section of the Committee.” (From the minutes of the Peasants’ Union for April, 1917.)

This last question was crucial for the labouring peasantry as the Land Sections of the Public Committees, following directions from the Centre, were insisting the peasants continue to pay rent to the landlords, pending the resolution of the land question by the Constituent Assembly. The peasants, on the other hand, given some political freedom by the Revolution, considered their slavery and exploitation at the hands of the idle landlords at an end.

The peasants were still badly organized and scarcely prepared to cope with the problems posed by the seizure of land from the landlords, the monasteries, and the State, and its declaration as social property. That’s why they insisted the Union should get control of the Land Section. In fact the peasants insisted the business of the Land Section be submitted to the members of the Anarchist Communist Group. But we, the members of the Group, entreated them not to formulate this demand for the time being, as we wished to avoid premature armed struggle with the authorities of Aleksandrovsk (our *uyezd*). Meanwhile the Group resolved to lead an intensive agitation in Gulyai-Pole and the surrounding region to encourage the peasants to pressure the Public Committee to abolish its Land Section and allow them to organize independent Land Committees.

This propaganda was greeted by the peasants with enthusiasm. However, from the central authorities came an order to the Public Committee stating that the Land Sections were part of the Public Committees and must not be abolished but rather renamed “Land Departments”... . (And later, as we shall see, the Land Departments were renamed “Land Committees” by the government itself.)

Carrying out our mandates from the Peasants' Union, we succeeded in gaining control of the Land Department which I was put in charge of. With the support of the Peasants' Union and the Public Committee itself, as well as the approval of the A-K Group, I became for a time the de facto ideological leader of the whole Public Committee.

Our group embarked on this dangerous path thanks solely to my influence. I was driven to this course by my reading of our anarchist press during the first two months of the Revolution. Not a trace could I find of any efforts on the part of the anarchists to create a powerful organization which would master the psychology of the toiling masses and show its organizing skills in developing and defending the nascent Revolution. I saw this movement so dear to me splintered as in the past into various groupuscules. So I made up my mind to provide an impetus towards unification of the movement by setting an example with an anarcho-communist group from the downtrodden countryside. This was all the more important to me as I sensed a certain disdain for the countryside among our urban propagandists.

## Chapter 7: The first of May. Relationship of the peasants to the land question

1 May 1917. Ten years had passed since I last participated in this labour holiday so I made a special effort to carry out agitational work to organize its celebration among the workers, the soldiers of the artillery detachments, and the peasants.

I collected all the documents relating to the actions of the workers of the cities during the last days of April and presented them to our group, so that our members could prepare their own interpretations for agitational work among the peasants, workers, and soldiers.

The commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Serbian regiment sent a delegation to us to sound us out on the wish of this regiment of the Serbian state to participate with the toilers of Gulyai-Pole in the workers' holiday. Of course we had no objection, even when they proposed to take part fully armed. We relied on our own strength which was quite sufficient to disarm this regiment, if necessary.

Demonstrations began in the streets of Gulyai-Pole at 9:00 a.m. The assembly point of all the demonstrations was Market Square, now known as Martyrs of the Revolution Square.

Without wasting any time, the anarchists delivered the news about the actions of the Petrograd proletariat of April 18–22, pressuring the government to dismiss ten capitalist ministers and transfer all power to the Soviets of Peasants', Workers', and Soldiers' Deputies. The anarchists described how these actions were suppressed by force of arms. This news transformed the character of the demonstration which became hostile to the Provisional Government and all the socialists who took part in that government.

The commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Serbian regiment made haste to lead his troops back to their quarters. Part of the artillery detachment declared their solidarity with the anarchists and joined the ranks of the demonstrators.

The demonstrators were so numerous that their procession seemed endless. After passing a resolution, "Down with the Government and all the parties responsible for inflicting this disgrace on us...", they marched through the streets singing the *March of the Anarchists*. In ranks five to eight abreast it took several hours for their column to pass.

The mood was so elated and hostile to the Government and its agents, that the politicians of the Public Committee and the officers of the artillery detachment took refuge at the headquarters of the Serbian regiment. The only exceptions were two officials who were favourites of the soldiers: the anarchist sympathizer Shevchenko and the artist Bogdanovich. The Militia, which during its brief existence had yet to make a single arrest, disappeared entirely from Gulyai-Pole.

The anarchists told the mass of demonstrators about the *Chicago anarchist martyrs*. The demonstrators honoured their memory by kneeling with bowed heads and then asked the anarchists to lead them without delay to fight against the Government, its agents, and the bourgeoisie.

The day passed, however, without violence.

At that time the authorities of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav were keeping a close eye on Gulyai-Pole and would have liked nothing better than to provoke us prematurely to battle.

The whole month of May was devoted to intensive work in the peasant congresses of Gulyai-Pole and Aleksandrovsk.

At the Aleksandrovsk congress I reported that the toiling peasantry of Gulyai-Pole did not trust the Public Committees to carry out the work of the Revolution and had taken control of the local committee. And I explained just how this was done.

The delegates of the peasants at this congress congratulated the peasants of Gulyai-Pole and promised to follow their example. The S-Rs at the congress registered their approval but the S-Ds and Kadets complained that the approach taken by the peasants of Gulyai-Pole towards the Public Committees ran counter to the general political line of the new government. According to them the taking over of established territorial administrations (the Public Committees) by a peasant organization was ruinous to the revolutionary cause for it was undermining the prestige of the local government organs.

One of the peasants exclaimed: "You're absolutely right! That's exactly what we're doing. We shall try in each of our districts to subvert the governmental pretensions of these Public Committees until we adapt them to our own outlook, until they accept our right to freedom and independent action in the seizing of the land from the pomeshchiks."

This declaration from the ranks of the peasant delegates sufficed to quiet the S-Ds and Kadets. Otherwise the peasant delegates would have left the meeting hall. The S-Ds and Kadets had no desire to be left in an empty hall for at this period of the Revolution they still hoped to master the revolutionary mood of the toilers.

This congress of Aleksandrovsk ended with the passing of a resolution about the transfer of the land into the hands of labouring society without compensation. A provincial committee was elected. The S-Rs rejoiced while the S-Ds and Kadets were furious. The peasant delegates dispersed to their own districts, resolved to organize themselves without the assistance of these political "prattlers", to unify their villages in order to carry out a common armed struggle against the pomeshchiks. "Otherwise," they said, "the Revolution will perish and we shall again be left without land..."

When M. Shramko and I returned from the provincial congress of Aleksandrovsk and reported the results to the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Pole raion, the peasants regretted very much having sent us to this congress. They said: "It would have been better for us not to participate in this congress, rather we should have held our own congress here in Gulyai-Pole for the raions of Aleksandrovsk uyezd. We are convinced that here we would have made more rapid progress towards our goal of seizing the land for social use. But it's too late now. We hope our Gulyai-Pole Committee of the Peasants' Union will make known our position on this question not only to peasants of Aleksandrovsk uyezd, but also to those of the adjacent uyezds: Pavlograd, Mariupol', Berdyansk, and Melitopol'. Let them know we won't be satisfied with resolutions — it is necessary to act."

This stance on the part of the peasants gave rise to the Declaration of the Gulyai-Pole Peasants' Union stating that "the toiling peasants of the Gulyai-Pole raion believe in their inalienable right to proclaim as communal property the lands of the pomeshchiks, the monasteries, and the State, and intend to carry this into effect in the near future." A special leaflet was issued urging the toiling peasantry to prepare themselves for this act of justice.

The voice of the Gulyai-Pole peasants was heard far beyond the borders of Ekaterinoslav gubernia. Delegates from peasant villages in other provinces began to arrive in Gulyai-Pole for consultations. This went on for several weeks. As Chairman of the Peasants' Union, I was constantly busy with these delegations.

Comrades from other organizations had to fill in for me in my regular duties while I carried on discussions with the visiting delegates. To some I gave advice, to others direct instructions on how to organize the peasants into unions and prepare them for the seizure of the land. And having seized the land from the oppressors, the next step would be either to set up agricultural communes on the former estates, or divide up the land and distribute it to the needy.

Most of the delegations told me: *"It would be a good thing if Gulyai-Pole were to act first."*

"Why?" I asked. The answer was always the same: "We don't have any organizers. We read little and hardly any information reaches us. Agitators haven't appeared among us... and we would not even have read the proclamations of your Union and the Anarchist Communist Group if our sons who work at the Yuzovsky Mine had not sent them to us."

Listening to the voice of the downtrodden countryside, I felt pain but also anger. I cursed the comrades holed up in the cities, forgetting the oppressed countryside. And yet the triumph of the Revolution ultimately would depend on the countryside. Meanwhile the Provisional Government was already beginning to slow down the revolutionary process, to take control. The creative development of the toilers, gradually becoming conscious of themselves and their rights, was being replaced by written programs meaningless for the real life of the country.

And the more this mental anguish tormented me, the more I was moved to search out the most out-of-the-way corners of the countryside, together with my comrades, to tell the peasants the truth about their situation and about the state of the Revolution. I was willing to set aside all commitments in Gulyai-Pole for the moment, to carry this message to the peasants, for unless they threw their fresh energies into the struggle, the Revolution was doomed.

This work kept me away from Gulyai-Pole for several days. At this time I was cheered by the imminent return of P. A. Kropotkin to Russia, knowing he would draw the attention of the comrades to the oppressed countryside. And who knows? — maybe our old mentor, Uncle Vanya (Nikolai Rogdaev), who had been so active in Ukraine in tsarist times, would also return, along with other comrades less well-known but very active in the old days. Then our activity would get a real boost. The toiling masses would receive thoroughgoing replies to the questions which tormented them. The voice of anarchism would be heard everywhere in the oppressed countryside and would collect and group under its banner the toiling masses to do battle with the pomeshchiks and factory owners for a new world of freedom, equality, and solidarity among all the people.

I believed in this project to the point of fanaticism, and on its behalf I became more and more absorbed in the everyday life of the peasants and workers. I strongly urged the Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Group to do the same.

## Chapter 8: The workers' strike

Early in June the anarchists of Aleksandrovsk invited me to a conference being held to unify all the local anarchists into a federation. I came immediately to help the comrades come to an agreement. The Aleksandrovsk anarchists were all manual or intellectual workers. Formally they were divided into anarcho-communists and anarcho-individualists, but in reality they were all revolutionary anarcho-communists. All of them I esteemed as the closest of friends and I did my best to help them set up a federation. After organizing themselves, they began to organize the workers and for a time had a great ideological influence on them.

When I returned from Aleksandrovsk, the workers of the Gulyai-Pole Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers invited me to help them set up their union and sign up as a member myself. And when I did this they asked me to direct their impending strike.

Now I was completely absorbed, firstly by the affairs of the Peasant's Union, secondly by the workers. However, among the workers there were comrades with a better grasp of workplace problems than myself, for which I was grateful. I undertook to lead the strike, hoping to win over these fine comrades and draw them into our Group. One of them — V. Antonov — was sympathetic to the S-Rs. The others were non-party. Of these especially energetic were Seregin and Mironov.

Before declaring the strike, the workers of both foundries, all the mills, home workshops, blacksmith's and joiner's shops held a meeting. The upshot was that I was asked to formulate their demands and present them through the union executive to the owners of the enterprises. While this was going on it became clear to me that comrades Antonov, Seregin, and Mironov had been working as anarchists for quite some time in the workshop committees. In fact Antonov had been elected chairman of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. These comrades had not joined our Group only because they were overloaded with their work in the shops. Naturally I was against this. From the day of my return from prison I had insisted on the necessity of our Group being well-informed about the work of all our supporters among the peasants. So I strongly urged these comrades to join the Group immediately and in future to coordinate with us their own work in the workshop committees and among the workers generally. The comrades entered the Group and then joined with me in summoning the proprietors of all the enterprises in order to present them with the workers' demands, which reduced simply to: a wage increase of 80 to 100 percent.

Such a proposal from the workers aroused a storm of protest from the proprietors who categorically refused a wage hike of any such proportions. We gave them one day to consider our position while the workers continued to work at their machines. The next day the proprietors came to the Union Soviet with their own counter proposal of a 35 to 40 percent wage increase. As representatives of the workers we considered this offer insulting and, after a lengthy debate which became abusive on both sides, we offered them one more day to reconsider, as required by civil law. The proprietors and their agents, some of whom knew the constitutions of trade unions by heart and were socialists by conviction, left the meeting assuring us they would not

be returning the next day with an offer higher than the one already on the table. They knew the central authorities would back them up.

We called together the members of the workshop committees and representatives from the home workshops and discussed a simultaneous work stoppage for the following day, timed to coincide with the moment when the proprietors would leave the trade union Soviet after arriving without a new offer. It was decided that the Soviet must plant one of its supporters at the telephone exchange to connect my telephone directly with all the workshops. Then I could advise the workers of the rejection of their demands and the owners, upon returning to their enterprises, would be greeted by demonstrations of striking workers.

I now proposed to the members of the Trade Union executive and factory committees a plan of expropriation of all the money capital to be found in the enterprises and the Gulyai-Pole Bank. I had no illusions about our ability to take over the enterprises, even with this cash at our disposal. The uyezd and gubernica Public Service Committees as well as the commissars of the central government would send troops. And these troops, hoping to win favour with the central authorities and avoid being sent to the front to face the Germans, would shoot the best militants of the workers, myself in particular. It was important to me to bring forward the idea of expropriation of capitalist enterprises at a time when the Provisional Government had still not succeeded in controlling the labouring masses and diverting them counter-revolutionary ways.

However, the majority of members of the trade union and factory committees earnestly requested that I refrain from presenting such a plan of action to the mass of the workers. They said we weren't ready for such a step, justified though it might be, and premature action on our part might jeopardize any possibility of carrying out such a program in the future, when we would be better prepared.

After a frank discussion, the members of the Group came to the same conclusion. If my proposals were carried out now, the workers would have to depend on the peasantry to sustain them by expropriating the estates of the pomeshchiks. Practically this wouldn't be possible until the fall harvest. Thus we would be taking a fatal step.

These conclusions shook me. I no longer insisted on immediate expropriation of the factories and workshops. But I urged that my proposal be accepted as the basis of the work of the factory committees — namely to prepare the workers to carry out expropriation in the near future. I assured the worker comrades that the peasants were also thinking along the same lines and said we must devote all our strength to coordinate the aspirations of both peasants and workers that they might be realized in practice simultaneously.

My position was adopted. At that time I was elected by all the workers as chairman of the Trade Union and Mutual Aid fund. Comrade Antonov was selected to be my deputy and replacement in the event of my being overloaded with work in other organizations.

The peasants also chose a comrade as a back-up who could replace me. But in both cases the rank-and-file insisted any initiatives come from me and that I coordinate the activities of both organizations.

\* \* \*

The proprietors of the factories, mills and workshops came again to the Trade Union Soviet. Their position had not changed from the previous day. After two hours of bargaining they had a fit of generosity and agreed to increase wages by 45 to 60 percent. My response, as chairman of the

meeting, was to declare our negotiations at an end. “The Trade Union Soviet has empowered me to take control over all public enterprises directed by you, citizens, but not rightfully belonging to you. We shall settle with you on the street in front of your respective businesses. Meeting adjourned!”

I collected my papers and headed for the telephone. At this moment, the owner of the largest factory in Gulyai-Pole, Boris Mikhailovich Kerner, got up from his seat and exclaimed: “Nestor Ivanovich, don’t be in such a hurry to end the meeting. Personally I consider the workers’ demand totally justified. They are right to expect us to comply with their proposal and I, for one, will sign my agreement to this...”

The other proprietors and especially their agents cried indignantly: “What are you doing, Boris Mikhailovich?”

“No, no, gentlemen, you do as you wish. I’m obligated to satisfy the demand of my workers,” replied Kerner.

I told them all to calm down, called for order, and asked: “Citizens, you’re all sticklers for law and order. Is it legal to re-open the meeting to discuss the same question which led to its adjournment?”

“Certainly, certainly!” was heard from all the proprietors and their agents.

“Then I declare the meeting open and propose that all of you sign the contract raising the workers’ wages by 80 to 100 percent.” And I handed out copies of the contract previously prepared. Feeling rather faint from fatigue and nervous tension, I handed over the meeting to comrade Mironov and retired to another room to take a short break.

Half an hour later I returned to the meeting hall. The proprietors began to sign the text of my proposed conditions. When they had all signed and left the Union hall, I sat at the telephone and called the worker-comrades in all the enterprises about the success of our negotiations, about the acceptance of our demands, and advised everyone to stay at their jobs until evening. And in the evening the members of the Union Soviet made detailed reports about our collective victory....

From that time on the workers of Gulyai-Pole and the surrounding region prepared themselves and organized all their workplaces. They studied the economic and administrative aspects of their enterprises and readied themselves for the seizure and direct management of these businesses.

Also from this time Gulyai-Pole attracted the special attention of the Ekaterinoslav Public Committee, along with the Ukrainian nationalist “*Selyan’ska spilka*” [Peasants’ Union], the Provincial Soviet of Workers’, Peasants’, and Soldiers’ Deputies, and the Provincial Industrial Committee, not to mention various Aleksandrovsk organizations controlled by agents of the Provisional Government. The visits to Gulyai-Pole of instructors, organizers, and propagandists from these places became more frequent.

But these agents always left without results, stymied by the actions of the peasant- and the worker-anarchists.

## Chapter 9: Some results

Let's move on to the "Public Committee" and look at how we, delegates from the Peasants' Union, made use of the authority of this Committee in our region.

In the first place, having taken over the Land Department, we also tried to ensure that the Department of Provisioning was also an independent entity. When the time came that I had taken over the whole Committee, myself and some of my comrades on the Committee demanded the abolition of the Militia. When the central authorities would not allow this, we deprived the Militia of the right to make independent arrests and searches and thereby reduced its role to acting as a courier service for the Public Committee. Furthermore, I summoned all the landowners and kulaks and collected from them all the documents concerning their acquisition of privately-owned land. By means of these documents the Land Department produced a precise account of all the wealth in land at the disposal of the pomeshchiks and kulaks for their idle life-style.

We organized as part of the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies a Committee of Batraks and created a batrak movement against the pomeshchiks and kulaks who were living on their labour.

We established practical control of the batraks over the pomeshchik and kulak estates and khutors, preparing the batraks to unite with the peasants and act together to expropriate all the wealth of individuals and declare it the social property of the toilers.

After all this, I personally was already losing interest in the Public Committee as an institution through which, within the framework of the existing order, one could do things legally which would keep the Revolution moving forward among the oppressed toilers in the countryside.

After consulting with a number of different comrades, I proposed to the whole group to establish an obligation for all our members: to propagandize among the peasants and workers urging them to change by any means possible their Public Committees, which tended to be less dependent on the will and rights of the peasants and workers than on the orders of some government commissar.

"Indeed," I said, "The Public Committees as territorial extension of the government cannot be revolutionary entities around which the living forces of the Revolution can group themselves. As the Revolution develops they must disappear. The labouring masses will dissolve them. The Social Revolution demands it.

"Taking a look now at the Social Revolution, we must work in the name of its ideas, we must help the peasants and workers move forward. We cannot allow the Public Committees to ignore the will of those who elected them. All their decisions (decisions and orders of the government) must be presented at general meetings — meetings of all citizens — for approval or rejection.

"It is now the end of June. That means that we, peasant and worker anarchists, have had four months to work legally among the oppressed toilers. It seems to me we have accomplished something in this time. Now we need to draw the proper conclusions from our experiences. Then we shall embark on new activity which reflects the ultimate goal of our movement. This activity must take place outside the Public Committee. We now have connections with a whole series

of regions where our ideas carry influence. And among them is Kamishevatsky raion where our comrades are playing a leading role in everything. This raion has already responded to our request for support in our struggle against the Aleksandrovsk Public Committee. The representative from this raion, Comrade Dudnik, has visited us three times in order to coordinate the actions of the workers of the Kamishevatsky region with the actions of the Gulyai-Pole workers. With each passing day the workers of other raions pay more attention to the voices of Gulyai-Pole and organize themselves according to our principles, in spite of attempts to dissuade them on the part of the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets. [At that time there were no Bolsheviks in the villages.]

“After a serious, four-month study of the Revolution, we know it is time to move forward in a definite direction and to directly oppose the activity of the politicians — those of the right already in power and those of the left striving for power, because the right-wing socialists and the bourgeoisie, who have appropriated the Revolution for themselves, are leading it into a blind alley. For us, working in the oppressed villages, it was evident from the first days of the Revolution that the Ukrainian peasantry had not yet had time to liberate itself entirely from the yoke of slavery and to grasp the real sense of the Revolution. The peasantry has hardly begun to shake off this heavy, ancient yoke and is already looking for ways to liberate itself from economic and political slavery. The oppressed villages are looking to the anarchists for help. It would be very easy for us to ignore the oppressed peasantry and not hasten to help them. We would just be adopting the attitude of our comrades in the cities and we would be repeating the false logic of these comrades who regard the peasants as partisans of a return to a bourgeois-capitalist system, etc. But I believe we won’t do anything of the sort. We’ve seen how things are working out in our own village and, based on our experience, we know there are revolutionary elements among the downtrodden peasants in other villages. It’s only necessary for us to release them from the garrote of statism which has been applied to them by the politicians. We revolutionary anarchists can render them reliable help.

“Our movement in the cities, on which our more senior comrades pinned such unrealistic hopes, is clearly much too weak to deal with problems of such vast scale and responsibility. I’m not saying that there are not people in our ranks who are capable of great things. Indeed there are such people. In our current work we need to take a close look at this problem: when there is responsible work to be done demanding tenacious efforts many of our comrades have avoided it in the past and are avoiding it now. This has contributed to and will continue to contribute to disorganization. Oh! How dangerous is this disorganization for the healthy life of our movement! Nothing can compare to it. Thanks to the disorganization of our movement as a whole, our best forces are dissipated even now during the Revolution without any benefit to our movement. This phenomenon has always hindered us but now we anarchists suffer from it more than ever. It prevents us from creating a powerful organization, indispensable for playing an effective role in this Revolution. Only such an organization would be capable of responding to the suffering cry of the Revolution. And the current appeal from the downtrodden villages is just such a cry of the Revolution. If we had the organization, then we anarchists would be able to respond to this appeal.

“It is painful to dwell on this, but it is extremely necessary. Each of us, comrades, who haven’t forgotten the ultimate goal of the Revolution, who haven’t lost themselves in nebulous and sterile theories, but who are sincerely searching for the most effective means of elevating and realizing our ideal in the life of the masses — each of us will not cease to protest against disorganization because it represents an immense danger for our movement. But to protest is not sufficient. I say:

we must work and work, tirelessly, not stifling in ourselves that uplifting revolutionary spirit, and especially not hindering the revolutionary development of others. With the help of this spirit, the anarchist ideal will generate fresh forces and allow us to create an organization which will get us moving in the right direction.”

## Chapter 10: Struggle against rent

The month of June. The peasants of the Gulyai-Pole raion refused to pay the second instalment of their land rent to the pomeshchiks and kulaks. They hoped that after the harvest they would seize the land themselves without entering into any negotiations with either the owners of the government which protected the owners. Then the peasants would divide the land between themselves and any factory workers who wished to cultivate it themselves.

Several other uyezds and raions followed the example of Gulyai-Pole.

In Aleksandrovsk there was alarm among the government authorities and their agents from the Socialist and Constitutional-Democratic Parties — the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets. With the technical and financial assistance of the Public Committees and the government commissar, the revolutionary uyezds and raions were inundated with party propagandists-agitators, appealing to the peasants not to undermine the authority of the Provisional “Revolutionary” Government which, they said, was very concerned with the fate of the peasants and intended in the very near future to convene the Constituent Assembly. And until this “competent” institution convened, and until it has issued its opinion about land reform, no one had the right to infringe on the ownership rights of the pomeshchiks and other landowners. And hastily, on orders from the top, the Land Departments were renamed Land Committees and separated from the Public Committees as independent entities. These Land Committees were invested with the right to collect from the peasants the rent for land rented by them from the pomeshchiks and kulaks. The local raion Land Committees were supposed to send these payments to the uyezd Land Committees which would then hand over the money to the landowners.

The propagandist-agitators of the various parties brazenly told the peasants that the pomeshchiks and kulaks still had huge taxes to pay for their land. “Our revolutionary government,” they said, “is demanding payment and the ‘poor’ landowners have nowhere else to get the money than from the peasants to whom they rented their land.”

A bitter struggle took place between the Anarchist Communist Group of Gulyai-Pole and the Peasants’ Union on the one hand — and these agents and the government bureaucracy which supported them on the other hand. And under the protection of the government were the well-organized rural, industrial, and commercial bourgeoisie. The peasants at the meetings held by order of the government commissars dragged down from the podium the representatives of those groups which supported the Provisional “Revolutionary” Government and beat them for their abominable speeches, hypocritically adorned with revolutionary phrases, designed to deflect the peasants from their main goal: to take possession of their own historical legacy — the land.

In some locales, the bewildered peasants, doubting their own just strivings, gathered their last kopeck to pay their rent to ferocious landowners, who were supported by the Church, the State, and its hired servant — the government.

But even those peasants who were lead into error did not lose hope for victory over their enemies. They listened with great attention to the call of the Anarchist Communist Group and the Peasants’ Union: “Don’t lose hope and bravely prepare for the next battle with the enemy.”

This is what I said at the time at a meeting of thousands of peasants and workers in Gulyai-Pole, inspired by the main idea of an appeal launched by the Anarchist Communist Group and the Peasants' Union (I was speaking in the name of both organizations):

"Toilers! Peasants, workers, and you worker-intellectuals who have taken sides with us! We have all seen how, in the space of four months, the bourgeoisie has organized itself and skilfully drawn into its ranks the socialists, who have become its faithful servants. If the propaganda carried out among the peasants in favour of paying rent to the landowners, even during this revolutionary time, does not provide sufficient proof, let me cite other facts, comrades, which you will find even more convincing:

"On July 3 the Petrograd proletariat rose up against the Provisional Government, which in the name of bourgeois rights was trying to suppress the revolution. For example, the government suppressed a bunch of Land Committees in the Urals which were acting in a revolutionary manner against the bourgeoisie. The members were thrown in prison. We have seen the same thing with our own eyes, where agents of the government — socialists — are urging the peasants to pay rent to the pomeshchiks. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of July the blood of our brother-workers flowed on the streets of Petrograd. The War Minister, the socialist Kerensky, summoned several tens of thousands of Cossacks — historically executioners of the free life of the labouring classes — to suppress the revolt. The socialists in the government went crazy in the service of the bourgeoisie and together with the Cossacks killed the best fighters of our working class brethren. By doing this the socialists are inviting the labouring classes to retaliate against them and against the bourgeoisie which has incited these odious, totally unjustifiable acts.

"What will result from this crime of the enemies of our emancipation and of the peaceful, happy life to which we aspire? A fight to the finish! But not only that! No good can come out of this for us. In the first place it harms the revolution, so long awaited and finally here but still not fully developed. The labouring masses have still not awakened from the mind-numbing slavery which has oppressed them for centuries. They are still feeling their way as with extreme caution they present to the new hangmen their demands for freedom and their rights to an independent life. But these rights, comrade, are met with the cannons and machine guns of the powerful...

"Let us be strong, brother workers, so strong that the enemies of our freedom, of our genuine liberation from everything evil and hateful, feel this strength in us.

"Let us go forward with sure steps towards self-organization and revolutionary self-activity! The future, the not too distant future, will be ours. We must get ready for it... ."

After me spoke a Ukrainian S-R who beseeched the toilers of Gulyai-Pole to remember that as a counterbalance to the "foul Provisional Government in Petrograd, in Kiev existed 'our' Ukrainian Government in the form of the Central Rada. It was genuinely revolutionary, the only government on Ukrainian soil capable and competent to restore freedom and a happy life for the Ukrainian people". In conclusion he exclaimed:

“Drive the katzaps from our land! — Death to these suppressors of our native tongue! In our native land long live ‘our’ power — the Central Rada — and its Secretariat!...”

But the toilers of Gulyai-Pole were deaf to the appeal of the Ukrainian “Socialist-Revolutionary”. Not only that, but they shouted at him in unison: “Down from the tribune! We don’t want your government!” Then they passed the following resolution:

“We pay our respects before the bravery of the working class warriors who fell in battle with the Provisional Government on July 3–5. We, the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Pole, will not forget this government atrocity... Death and damnation on the Provisional Government and the Government of Ukraine — the Central Rada and its Secretariat, the worst enemies of human freedom”.

For a long time after this discussion and the resolution voted by the peasants and workers, the Russian and Ukrainian nationalists and the state-socialists cursed me and the whole Anarchist Communist Group, because it was henceforth impossible for them to sing the praises of their various governments and their role in the toilers’ lives in Gulyai-Pole. The toilers looked upon them as hired agents and they were constantly interrupted when they tried to praise government power.

So day after day passed, accumulating into weeks and months, as my comrades and I circulated through the countryside, propagandizing the ideas of anarchism.

Soon arrived the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Peasants’ Unions of our uyezd, and our Union did not fail to send two delegates, Comrade Krat and myself. The Congress was crowded. Everyone said what had already been said many times. The Russian and Ukrainian S-Rs, the former represented by S. S. Popov, the latter by the teacher Radomsky, put on a display of solidarity before the peasant delegates by agreeing to work together in the struggle for land and freedom for the peasantry. After each had expounded his party’s program, they stood before the podium and shook hands.

The peasant delegates from Gulyai-Pole, Kamishevansky, Pozhdestbensky, and Konnorazdorskyy raions told them: “It’s all very fine that you are agreeing to struggle together for land and freedom, but where and against whom do you intend to struggle?”

“Everywhere and with anyone who does not want to hand over land to the peasants without compensation,” replied the S-R delegates.

“But ultimately we will finish our struggle in the Constituent Assembly,” said the S-R. Popov.

“In the All-Ukrainian *Seim*!” added the teacher Radomsky.

And here was a small difference of opinion between the S-R allies. They exchanged opinions in whispers while on the benches of the peasant delegates some were laughing, the others frowning.

At the end of the Congress representatives were elected to go to the Provincial Congress of the Peasants’ Unions and Soviets of Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.

In elections of delegates from the Uyezd Congress to the Provincial Congress, we, the Gulyai-Pole delegates, abstained. We declared our protest against the fact that delegates to the Provincial Congress were not elected directly by the grassroots. This abstention led to us being treated as disturbers of electoral law and order and therefore violently criticized by the leaders of the congress — the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets who said we were the only delegates who did not want what the peasants wanted. This provoked more laughter from the peasant delegates which soon became disruptive whistles when the big shots tried to speak.

We, the delegates of the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Pole, protested once more against the method of elections, insisting that the delegates to the Provincial Congress be elected directly by the peasants. Such an election would give a true picture of the revolutionary peasantry throughout the whole province, we said. But again we were treated as incorrectly understanding the interests of the peasants. The "leaders" of the congress proposed to bring up our point of view at the Provincial Congress of peasants and workers. But since we refused to participate in the elections to Provincial Congress from the delegates of the Uyezd Congress, then we could not stand as candidates and were thus excluded from the Provincial Congress.

However, we had numerous reasons to believe that the organizational bureau of the Provincial Congress would directly invite delegates from Gulyai-Pole because of an exchange of opinions which had taken place between the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Pole and the Provincial Committee of the Peasants' Unions. But the initiative for this would have to come from Ekaterinoslav, not Gulyai-Pole, i.e. not directly but in an indirect fashion. So we were not certain of participating in the Provincial Congress and returned to Gulyai-Pole with a gloomy feeling that we had suffered a defeat on this occasion.

However, our line of behaviour at the Congress was the correct one from our point of view, and we were not worried about the revolutionary future of our Peasants' Union. When we got back home we made a report to the Executive of the Peasants' Union as well as the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers which always took an interest in peasant congresses and asked to be informed about them. And then we made a report to a general meeting of peasants and workers in Gulyai-Pole and district. At the same time we prepared the peasants and workers to send delegates to the Provincial Congress even without an invitation. Our goal was to expose the attitude of the leaders of the Uyezd Congress which had just ended and also to inform the peasant delegates to the Provincial Congress about how the S-Rs, S-Ds, and Kadets had tried to stifle the revolutionary initiative and self-activity of the peasantry, how their agitator-propagandists with the assistance of the government commissars travelled around the cities and villages holding meetings where they duped the peasants and squeezed rent money out of them for the benefit of the pomeshchiks, rendering thus more difficult the situation of the peasants who, impoverished by the ravages of war, had not taken part in pillaging and brigandage like the pomeshchiks and kulaks, and were not able to acquire the money necessary to pay the landowners for the land which these thieves had appropriated.

But while we were preparing for the Provincial Congress, and also giving advice to the peasants of raions and uyezds belonging to other provinces, the Executive of the Peasant Union of Gulyai-Pole received from the Provincial Soviet of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies an invitation to send two delegates to the Provincial Congress of Soviets and Unions of Peasants', Workers', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies.

We decided to call a congress of the Gulyai-Pole Raion Peasant Union. At this time the Executive of the Union prepared a report appropriate for the agenda of the Provincial Congress.

## Chapter 11: P.A. Kropotkin arrives in Russia. Meeting with Ekaterinoslav anarchists

Around this time we received news that P. A. Kropotkin was already in Petrograd. The local newspapers had written about this, but we, peasant-anarchists, not hearing his powerful appeal to anarchists and his detailed instructions about how the anarchists should begin to overcome the fragmentation in their own movement so we could take our rightful place in the Revolution, did not believe the newspapers. But now we received newspapers and letters directly from Petrograd indicating that P. A. Kropotkin had been taken ill on the journey from London to Russia but had safely arrived at the very heart of the revolution — Petrograd. We heard about how he had been greeted by the socialists in power, in particular by A. Kerensky.

The joy in the ranks of our group was indescribable. A general meeting of the group was called which was devoted exclusively to the subject *What Does Our Old Friend Petr Alekseevich Have To Tell Us?*

We all came to the same conclusion: Petr Alekseevich showed us the concrete way to organize our movement in the villages. With his sensitivity and his lively comprehension, he saw the absolute necessity for the villages to have the support of our revolutionary force. As a true apostle of anarchism, he recognized the importance of this unique moment in Russian history and, using his moral influence on the anarchists and their groups, he hastened to formulate in a practical way the guidelines of revolutionary anarchism which must inspire the anarchists in this Revolution.

I composed a letter of welcome in the name of the Gulyai-Pole Peasant Group of Anarcho-Communists and sent it, if I remember correctly, to Petr Alekseevich care of the editorial staff of the newspaper “Burevestnik”.

In this letter we greeted Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin and congratulated him on his happy return to his country, expressing our belief that his country, in the person of its best people, has been waiting impatiently for the return of a tireless fighter for the highest concepts of justice, who could not help but influence the unfolding and realization of the Russian Revolution...

We signed: the Ukrainian Anarcho-Communist Group of the Village of Gulyai-Pole, Ekaterinoslav Province.

We didn't expect an answer to our modest welcoming letter. But we waited impatiently for an answer to the burning question of the moment, without which we would be wasting our efforts for our goal might not be the same as the goal of other groups or it might be the same but we might be working towards it in a completely different way. It seemed to us that the downtrodden countryside posed this direction question: “How do we go about seizing the land and, without submitting to any authority, drive out the parasites who produce nothing and live a life of luxury at our expense?”

The response to this question had been given by Petr Alekseevich in his work “The Conquest of Bread”. But the masses had not read this work, only a few individuals had read it, and now the masses no longer had time to read. What was necessary was that an energetic voice exposed to

them in clear, simple language the essential points of “Conquest of Bread” to prevent them from sinking into a speculative inertia, and to show them directly the right path to take and furnish a guide for their actions. But who could provide this lively, strong, straight-forward voice?

Only an anarchist-propagandist and organizer!

But, placing my hand on my heart, I asked: were there ever in Russia or Ukraine schools of anarchist propaganda? I had never heard of any. But if there were, then where were the advanced militants who had graduated from them?

Twice I travelled through several raions and uyezds belonging administratively to the same province, and I did not run into one situation where, in answer to my questions: “Have you had here any anarchist animators?” they would answer: “There have been.” Everywhere they answered: “We have never had any such. And we are very happy and grateful that you have not forgotten us.”

Where were the forces of our movement generally? In my view they were vegetating in the cities where they were often doing things they shouldn’t have been doing.

The arrival of Petr Alekseevich and his active participation in the Revolution (if his advanced age allowed such a thing) would hopefully give a strong push to our comrades in the cities. Otherwise the oppressed countryside would be enslaved by the political parties and, through them, by the power of the Provisional Government, and that would put an end to the subsequent development of the revolution.

My opinions drew support from those comrades who, working in the factories, had not travelled about the region and sampled the mood of the oppressed peasants directly. Those, on the other hand, who knew the villages, sharply criticized my thinking. They detected in it hesitation and doubt as to the revolutionary mood of the villages. “The villages,” they said, “have well understood the intentions of the agents of the different socialist parties and the bourgeoisie who have been coming around to them on behalf of the Provisional Government and would never under any circumstances allow themselves to be duped by these agents.”

Indeed there were signs of this mood in the villages, but in my view these signs were weak. At this critical moment in the Revolution, the peasants needed to feel that they had better support, especially for their revolutionary activists, so that they could bring about permanent change by getting rid of the existing privileged classes and not allowing new ones to take their place.

Two weeks went by. No news from Petrograd. We didn’t know how Petr Alekseevich viewed the role of our movement in the Revolution: *Were we on the right track? Or was it correct to concentrate our forces in the cities, paying little or no attention to the oppressed peasantry?*

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During this period of expectation arrived the time of the Provincial Congress of Soviets of Workers’, Peasants’, Soldiers’, and Cossacks’ Deputies and the Peasants Unions. [August 5–7, 1918]

An assembly of the Peasants’ Union was held in Gulyai-Pole. We discussed the agenda of the Provincial Congress. We spent a lot of time discussing the re-organizing of the Peasants’ Unions into Peasants’ Soviets and finally decided to send delegates to the Provincial Congress. I was elected representative of the peasants, and Comrade Seregin was elected representative of the workers.

I was particularly happy to go to Ekaterinoslav where I hoped to make contact with the Anarchist Federation and discuss all the questions which were of interest to our Group (especially the question: why are there no anarchist agitators going from the city into the villages?).

I deliberately arrived at the Congress a day early. From the railway station I went directly to the Federation's office. I found there the secretary — Comrade Molchansky, an old friend from Odessa. We knew each other in prison. With great joy we embraced each other.

I immediately pressured him: what were they doing in the cities? Why didn't they send organizers around the whole province?

Comrade Molchansky, waving his hands excitedly, said: "Brother, we don't have the forces. We're weak. We've only just pulled together a group and we've hardly attended to the workers in the local factories and soldiers in the garrison. We hope that with time our strength will increase and then we can establish closer links with you and the villages and begin more energetic work in the countryside... ."

For a long time after this we sat quietly and looked at each other, each of us absorbed in thinking about the future of our movement in the revolution... . And then Comrade Molchansky began to reassure me, affirming that in the near future there would arrive in Elizavetgrad Rogdaev, Roshchin, Arshinov and a bunch of other comrades and the focus of our work would be shifted into the villages. Then he led me into the Federation's club, which had earlier been known as the "English Club".

There I found many comrades. Some were arguing about the Revolution, others were reading, a third bunch were eating. In a word, I found an "anarchist" society which did not allow, as a matter of principle, any order, any authority, and which did not devote a moment to propagandize among the mass of toilers in the countryside who were in such dire need of this propaganda.

Then I asked myself: why did they requisition from the bourgeoisie such a large and well-appointed building? What use is it to them when, in this babbling crowd, there is no order even in the animated discussions with which they resolve the most important problems of the Revolution? Meanwhile the hall is not swept, in many places chairs are overturned, and the big table, covered with luxurious velvet, is scattered with lumps of bread, fish heads, and picked bones.

I observed all this with a heavy heart. At that moment into the club came Ivan Tarasyuk (actually Kabas), comrade Molchansky's deputy. With anguish and indignation he yelled, at first quietly, then at full voice: "Whoever ate at this table, clean it up!"... . Then he began to straighten the chairs.... .

Quickly everything was removed from the table and people set about sweeping the floor.

From the club I returned to the Federation office and picked out a bunch of brochures to take to Gulyai-Pole. I was intending to go to the office of the Congress to get a billet for the duration of the event when a young woman entered who turned out to be a comrade. She asked the comrades present to go with her to the Winter Theatre to back her up in a debate with the S-D "Nil" who was winning over a good number of workers. But the comrades present told her they were busy. Without another word she turned and left.

Comrade Molchansky asked me: "Do you know her? She is a fine, energetic comrade." I immediately left the office and overtook her. I proposed that we go together to the meeting but she answered: "If you will not speak, you will not be necessary to me there." I promised her I would speak.

Then she took me by the hand and we hurried to the Winter Theatre. This young and charming comrade told me along the way that she had become an anarchist three years earlier. It wasn't

easy for her. She had been reading Kropotkin and Bakunin for about two years. Now she felt that the works she read had helped to confirm her convictions. She had become an active proselytizer. Up until July she had spoken before worker audiences but had not dared to debate with the enemies of anarchism — the social democrats. In July at one of the open air meetings she debated ‘Nil’. He had whipped her. “Now,” she said, “I’m going to try as hard as I can to go up against ‘Nil’ again. He is the agitational superstar of the S-Ds.”

Our conversation ended there.

At the meeting I spoke against the celebrated “Nil”, using the pseudonym “Skromny” (my nickname in prison). I spoke badly although my comrades later assured me that I had been very good, just a little nervous.

As for my young and energetic comrade, she won over the whole hall with her pleasant but strong speaking voice: the auditorium was delighted with this voice and there was dead quiet when they listened to what she said, changing to stormy applause and thunderous cries: “Excellent, excellent, Comrade!

The comrade didn’t speak long, 43 minutes, but she stirred up the mass of listeners against the positions espoused by “Nil” so that when the latter tried to respond to all those who had spoken against him, the entire hall erupted against him: “That’s not true! Don’t make up false stories — the anarchists are telling the truth — you are telling lies!...”

When we returned from the meeting, several comrades joined us. Our young comrade said to me: “You know, Comrade Skromny, this ‘Nil’ with his influence over the workers up to now has been driving me crazy. I have set myself the goal of destroying his influence, whatever the cost. There’s only one thing holding me back — my youth. The workers are more trusting of older comrades. I’m afraid that this will prevent me from fulfilling my duties to the workers...”

I could only wish her further successes in her revolutionary anarchist work, and we separated after promising to meet the next day to speak about Gulyai-Pole about which she had heard good things.

This meeting caused me to arrive late at the office of the Congress and I was unable to obtain a hotel room. So I spent the night in Comrade Seregin’s room.

I devoted the whole next day to the Congress and could not find a moment to meet with the young comrade as I had promised her. The second day of the Congress I was occupied the whole time at the Land Commission. Here I met with the Left S-R Schneider, sent to the Provincial Congress from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers’, Peasants’ & Cossacks’ Deputies and elected to the Land Commission of the Congress. The Commission unanimously passed a resolution about socializing the land and passed this resolution on to the presidium of the Congress. After this the Commission asked Comrade Schneider to make a report about what was happening in Petrograd.

He made only a brief summary as time was lacking, he said, and asked us to support the resolution about re-organizing the Peasants’ Unions into Soviets. This re-organization was, subsequently, approved by the Congress. This was the only question on the agenda at the Congress which had not been considered at the meeting in Gulyai-Pole.

On our return from the Congress, and after a series of reports, the Peasants’ Union of Gulyai-Pole was transformed into a Soviet of peasants; its principles were not modified nor were its methods of struggle which it was intensively preparing the peasants to use in its upcoming struggles. It appealed to the workers to drive out the owners of the factories and plants and to liquidate their right of private ownership of social enterprises.

During this time, while we were busy with the formal transformation of Union into Soviet, in Moscow on August 14 opened the All-Russian Democratic Conference and on its tribune appeared our esteemed, dear elder – Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin.

Our Anarchist Communist Group of Gulyai-Pole was dumbfounded by this news, although we appreciated very well that it was difficult for our old friend, after so many years of work and being shunted about foreign lands, preoccupied in his old age with humanitarian ideas, to return to Russia and refuse his assistance to this Democratic Conference. But all such considerations had to take a back seat to the tragic crisis in the Revolution which immediately followed this Conference.

We condemned our old friend for taking part in the Conference. We naively imagined that the former apostle of anarchism had transformed himself into a sentimental old man searching for peace and quiet and the strength for applying his knowledge to life one last time. But this blame we kept inside our group, and our enemies were not aware of it, because deep down Kropotkin remained for us the greatest and strongest theoretician of the anarchist movement. We knew that if he were not so advanced in years, he would have put himself at the head of the Russian Revolution and would have been the uncontested chief of anarchism.

Whether we were right or not, we never discussed with our political enemies the question of the participation of Kropotkin in the All-Russian Democratic Conference of Moscow.... .

Thus with a sinking feeling we listened to what Petr Alekseevich said. We didn't lose faith that he remained always dear and close to us, but the revolutionary moment called us in a different direction. For a number of reasons of purely artificial character, the Revolution showed signs of reaching an impasse. On it was fitted a noose by all the political parties participating in the Provisional Government. And all these parties were gradually becoming more entrenched in power and becoming in themselves a threatening counter-revolutionary force.

## Chapter 12: Kornilov's march on Petrograd

Around August 20 1917 our group reviewed the distribution and utilization of our forces. This meeting was the most serious one we had held. I have already mentioned that our group did not have in its ranks a single theoretically-trained anarchist. We were all peasants and workers. Our schools turned out half-educated people. Schools of anarchism did not exist. Our fund of knowledge of revolutionary anarchism was obtained reading anarchist literature for many years and exchanging views with each other and with the peasants, with whom we shared all that we had read and understood in the works of Kropotkin and Bakunin. We owe thanks to Comrade Vladimir Antoni (known as Zarathustra) for supplying us with literature.

In the course of this very important meeting we discussed a number of burning questions and came to the conclusion that the Revolution was having the life choked out of it by the garrote of the State. It was turning pale, weakening, but could still emerge victorious in the supreme struggle. Help would come to it principally from the revolutionary peasant masses who would remove the garrote and get rid of this plague — the Provisional Government and its satellite parties. Drawing some conclusions from our analysis for practical activity we formulated a series of positions, namely:

The Russian Revolution has, from the beginning, posed a clear choice to the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist groups, a choice which imperiously demands a decision on our part. Either we go to the masses and dissolve ourselves in them, creating from them revolutionary cadres, and make the Revolution; or we renounce our slogan about the necessity of social transformation, the necessity of carrying through to the end the workers' struggle with the powers of Capital and the State.

To remain as before, restricted to isolated group activities, limited to publishing pamphlets, journals, and newspapers and holding meetings — was impossible. At this time of decisive events, the anarchists risked finding themselves completely isolated from the masses, or dragging along behind them.

Anarchism, by its very essence, cannot accept such a role. Only a lack of understanding and enthusiasm on the part of its adherents — the anarchist groups and federations — created the possibility of dragging it down the wrong path.

Every militant group, the revolutionary anarchists in particular, must try to draw the labour masses to its side at the moment of insurrection or revolution. At the moment when they begin to show confidence in the group, it must, without being carried away, follow the broken path of unfolding events (a path which may be revolutionary but not anarchist) and seize the right moment to draw the labouring masses in the right direction.

This is an old method, but one not experienced by our movement in practice, and one which will not be experienced until such time as we master certain organizational principles and create our own organization. A serious movement requires strategic planning. A movement without a definite organization of forces is a bunch of uncoordinated groups, frequently ignorant of each other and even taking conflicting actions in relation to their political enemies. Such a movement

could, certainly, be created at the revolutionary moment, but it would be impossible to infuse it with a lasting existence, to give it a credo which could guide the revolting masses towards genuine liberation from their economic, political, and moral chains. There would just be a useless loss of human lives, sacrificed in a struggle both necessary and just in its goals, but unequal.

After having observed for seven months the anarchist movement in the cities, our group could no longer ignore the very numerous militants who failed to recognize their role and were stifling the movement, preventing it from liberating itself from the traditional forms of disorganization and transforming itself from grouplets into a mass movement. That is why our Group threw itself with renewed energy into the study of problems not yet solved by the anarchist movement, for example: the problem of coordinating the activities of different groups as events unfolded. None of the federations which sprang up after the February Revolution had formulated an answer although they all published their resolutions and indicated their view of the way forward.

That's why, after having feverishly searched for a guiding rule in the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta, we arrived at the conclusion that our group of anarchist-communist peasants of Gulyai-Pole could neither imitate the anarchist movement of the cities, nor could we listen to its voice. We could count on no one but ourselves at this critical moment in the Revolution. It was up to us to help the downtrodden peasants realize that they must create the Revolution themselves in the villages, that it is up to them to determine the character and the course of the Revolution. We must not let their faith in themselves be shaken by the political parties and the government which have done nothing to create the revolutionary movement in the villages.

And the group dispersed among the downtrodden toilers of the countryside, leaving only an information office; by word and action the Group helped the toilers get their bearings at that moment in the Revolution and inspired them to a great intensity in their struggle.

In a very short time after adopting our decision, as we began already to notice the fruits of our organizational activity in the raion, we became convinced that we had been correct in our perception of stagnation in the Revolution and the critical situation full of mortal menace. The Revolution found itself definitely in the noose which the statist needed only to tighten in order to strangle it.

*The introduction of the death penalty at the Front* was direct evidence that revolutionary soldiers must die on the external Front, while the counter-revolutionaries could continue their work at the very heart of the Revolution. Revolutionary military units, which were fraternizing with workers in the cities and with peasants in the villages, were beginning to see themselves as slaves of militarism and were thinking of using the tools provided them — cannons and machine guns — against their real enemies. Now those units with a revolutionary attitude were being ordered to the Front, as being too dangerous to the growing forces of the counter-revolution.

Seeing all this and recognizing how the way was being prepared for strengthening the power of the bourgeoisie, already recovering from its original defeat by the Revolution and ready to get its revenge, we were still more strongly convinced that our method of helping the toilers to correctly orient themselves at this critical moment was the true method. However, it was imperative to complete the process and issue clear directives.

What had we accomplished with our actions?

We had ensured that from the end of August the peasants had completely understood us and would not allow their ranks to be splintered into various political groupings, thereby dissipat-

ing their power so that they were incapable of achieving what was strong and durable in the Revolution.

The better the peasants understood us, the more strongly they believed in themselves and in their direct role in the Revolution. Their role was, firstly, to abolish private ownership of land and to proclaim it social property; and secondly, with the help of the urban proletariat, to abolish any possibility of new privileges.

And thus we arrived at those days when our gloom and doom about this anxious moment in the Revolution received its full justification. We received news from the Provisional Government itself and from the Petrograd Soviet of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies that the commander-in-chief of the external Front, General Kornilov, had withdrawn from the Front a division of soldiers loyal to him and was advancing on Petrograd to liquidate the Revolution and its conquests.

That was on August 29, 1917. An anarchist from Aleksandrovsk, M. Nikiforova, had arrived and organized a meeting which I chaired. While she was speaking, a courier delivered a packet in which I read the news about Kornilov's advance. I broke into her speech and made a brief statement about the bloody repression which was threatening the revolution. Then I read two telegrams from the Government and from the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers', and Cossacks' Deputies.

This news produced a painful impression on the peasants and workers present. They tried to contain their emotions, but someone cried out from the crowd: "The brothers' blood is already flowing, but here the counter-revolutionaries are walk around freely, laughing at us!" He pointed at the former Gulyai-Pole political cop Citizen Ivanov. Comrade Nikiforova jumped down from the tribune and arrested him while the crowd hurled abuse at him.

But I also jumped down and went to Nikiforova and Ivanov, already surrounded by a bunch of comrades from our Group and the Peasants' Soviet and insisted that the constable be released. I told him to relax, that no one was going to touch him. Then I made my way back to the tribune and told the peasants and workers that our struggle in defence of the Revolution should begin not with the murder of a former policeman like Ivanov, who had turned himself in without resistance in the first days of the Revolution and had not gone into hiding.

"All we should do with the likes of him is keep an eye on him. Our struggle must find expression in a more serious way: what exactly I'm not going to say right now because we need to have an emergency meeting of the Peasants' Soviet together with workers from the Anarchist Communist Group; but afterwards I promise to come back and explain my ideas."

All the members of the Soviet had gathered. When I arrived the meeting was started. I read the dispatches and next presented my report on what we needed to do and how we were going to do it. The dispatch from the Petrograd Soviet suggested the formation of local "Committees for the Salvation of the Revolution".

The meeting assigned members to this Committee from its own ranks, expressing the wish that it call itself the "Committee for the *Defence* of the Revolution" and entrusted me to direct its work.

We, the members of this hastily knocked together organization, got together and decided to begin disarming all the bourgeois in the region and liquidating their rights to the wealth of the

people: on the land, in the factories and plants, in the printshops, theatres, circuses, cinemas and other public enterprises.

We considered that this was the only sure way to liquidate both General Kornilov's movement and the rights of the bourgeoisie to dominance over the toiling masses.

During the time that I was at the meeting of the Soviet, and then the meeting of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (all this took about five hours), the mass of toilers was still awaiting my return to finish my speech on how to defend the Revolution.

When, finally, I arrived back, all the members of the Soviet, the members of the Group of Anarcho-Communists, and some members of the Trade Union were parading up and down the street with rifles and shotguns on their shoulders. Gulyai-Pole had been transformed into an armed revolutionary camp.

I went through the gate into the public garden and made my way to the square where the tribune was situated. The peasants and workers had broken up into groups dispersed throughout the garden and were animatedly exchanging opinions about the disturbing news. They gathered around me rapidly, saying: "Well! Are you finally free? Are you going to finish what you were starting to tell us? The bad telegrams prevented you!"

I climbed up on the tribune exhausted, because I had been travelling all over the raion in the preceding days, promising myself that I would only have one meeting on Sunday and then I could rest. But the disquieting telegrams, which the peasants called "bad", did not allow me any time to rest.

Finishing my thought about the defence of the Revolution, I clarified that no one except they themselves could defend and further develop it. The Revolution is their business and they must be its bold propagators and its real defenders.

I next told them what had been decided at the assembly, that a Committee of the Defence of the Revolution had been formed which was destined to combat not only the movement of General Kornilov but also the Provisional Government and all the socialist parties which shared its ideas. I added that this Committee would become effective only when everyone, no matter who, adopted it as their own. As we group ourselves around this Committee, I said, we will sustain it not just with words but with actions.

I presented in shortened form to the large audience the program of action of this Committee.

From the crowd were heard cries of "Long Live the Revolution!" And these were cries not of activists used to carrying on in this way at political meetings, but truly spontaneous cries coming from the depths of the soul of the people.

"What now, Comrade Nestor," sounded several voices, "should we prepare to go fight at the side of the city workers?"

I explained to them a point from the program of action of the Committee in which it was said that the peasants by "sotnias", and the workers by factories and workshops, must discuss our resolution and tomorrow (August 30) send us their delegates with their final decision.

With this ended August 29, 1917. It was a depressing day because of the news about General Kornilov's movement. But then it pushed the masses to take the initiative and engage in revolutionary self-activity. And wherever among the workers were found revolutionaries who understood the tasks at hand, there the theoretical side of events was discussed and a plan of action formulated to guide the masses in their direct struggle.

On the next day early in the morning I walked to Cathedral Square in Gulyai-Pole. Groups of workers from the plants and peasants from the sotnias were marching along the street under

black and red banners and singing as they proceeded to the building of the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies, in which was located the "Committee for the Defence of the Revolution". I sprinted through the courtyard of the building and then into the front yard of the Soviet in order to meet the demonstrators. When they spotted me they broke into a thunderous shout: "Long Live the Revolution! Long Live Its True Son, and Our Friend, Comrade Makhno!"

These shouts were flattering for me, but I felt I didn't deserve them from the toilers. I stopped these enthusiastic shouts and asked them to listen to me. But the crowd picked me up and carried me on their hands, crying "Long Live the Revolution! Long Live Comrade Makhno!"

Finally, I prevailed upon the demonstrators to listen to me and when they had quieted down I asked them in honour of what they had come to the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution?

"We have come to put ourselves at the disposition of the Committee," was the response, "and we are not alone."

"You mean there's still life in the old dog?!"

"Yes, yes, and again yes!" cried the demonstrators.

I began to feel dizzy, I almost wept with joy because of the great spirit of the Ukrainian peasants and workers. Before me was embodied the peasant will for freedom and independence, which only the Ukrainian spirit can so quickly and strongly display in such breadth and depth.

My first words to the demonstrators were: "Listen, comrades, if you have come to put yourselves at the disposal of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, then I propose that you divide yourselves up into groups of 10 or 15, with 5 to a wagon, and don't lose any time — cover the whole Gulyai-Pole raion and visit the pomeshchiks' estates, the kulak khutors, and the rich German colonies and confiscate from the bourgeoisie all the fire-arms you can find: rifles, muskets, shot-guns, even swords. But do not harm in any way, either by word or gesture, the bourgeoisie themselves.... With revolutionary honour and courage we must do this in the interests of the Revolution. For the leaders of the bourgeoisie, taking advantage of the negligence of the revolutionaries, have organized their forces under the protection of the Provisional Government and have already taken up arms against the Revolution.

"As the representative of the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies of the raion, the Anarchist Communist Group, and the Soviet of the Trade Union, I am authorized to direct our revolutionary movement on an interim basis, while at the same time remaining the chief commissar of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution. As such I consider it appropriate to say to all the comrades setting out to disarm the bourgeoisie that they must not get carried away and be involved in pillaging. Pillaging is not a revolutionary act, and so long as I am at the head our movement any delinquent parties will find themselves before the Tribunal of the Revolutionary General Assembly of Peasants and Workers of Gulyai-Pole.

"In the course of two or three days we must disarm the bourgeoisie and turn in all weapons to the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution for distribution to the real defenders of the Revolution. So don't waste time, break up into groups, be sure to take a certificate from the Committee verifying your official role in confiscating the arms we need from the bourgeoisie. Go!"

When the peasants realize that something has to be done, they quickly get it done. As soon as I mentioned to the demonstrators that they should split up into groups, with five to a wagon, immediately people went to fetch conveyances from their homes, and about 30–40 wagons had already arrived and were assembled on Cathedral Square awaiting passengers.

As for the certificates, they had been prepared the night before by the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution. It remained only to inscribe the names of the bearers and add the signature of the Chief Commissar. And the latter was prepared to sign these certificates even standing in the middle of the street. That's what happened — I stood next to the wagons and signed the certificates of peasants and workers who were setting out to disarm the bourgeoisie.

When everything was ready, and everyone had taken their place on the wagons, I spoke a few words about the present critical moment for the Revolution, about the importance of simultaneous and decisive actions on the part of the toilers on the local level. And here in Gulyai-Pole the peasants and workers were setting an example by their action against the bourgeoisie, an example which was being emulated by several neighbouring regions. The wagons then set out to cover the raion.

Another group of peasants and workers proceeded to confiscate weapons in Gulyai-Pole itself from the bourgeoisie and from officers who had arrived here from the Front.

The Committee for the Defence of the Revolution together with the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies held a special meeting at which it was decided to convene in short order an extraordinary raion Congress of Soviets, with the participation of the Anarchist Communist Group and the Soviet of the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers of Gulyai-Pole.

It was also decided at this impromptu meeting to strengthen links with the Anarchist Communist Group in order to take joint action, before the Congress of Soviets, to withdraw from the "Public Committees" in the raion the right to make binding decisions of a social character.

This collaborative work of the three revolutionary entities allowed our group to further develop its activity among the oppressed toilers of the villages and to get them used to the idea of a free, libertarian society.

The toilers of the Gulyai-Pole raion, without worrying about any repercussions on the part of the central authorities, acted to limit the power of all the Public Committees of the coalition government of socialists with the bourgeoisie. These Committees, the principal function of which had consisted of issuing ordinances and decrees telling people what they could or couldn't do without permission from the government, and what they could or couldn't think without authorization by the future Constituent Assembly. Now they were limited in their rights to the point that they were transformed from legislative bodies into consultative bodies. They were deprived of the right to decide in a definitive way any question of public interest no matter what, without having it approved by a public assembly.

Such an attitude on the part of the toilers towards "rights" and towards the authority of their oppressors and enemies of the Revolution, enemies of everything healthy and creative in it, raised a terrible stir in the ranks of the ruling stratum. The zealous supporters of the idea of coalition with the bourgeoisie against the Revolution began to sound the alarm. However, in spite of the fury and rage they displayed at meetings of the Communal Committees and other local meetings, and in spite of all the actions taken by them with the help of the central authorities to undermine the position taken by the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion towards them and the power of their government, and in spite of, finally, all the foul tales spread everywhere, either orally or in print, attacking the toilers of the raion in general and the Anarchist Communist Group in particular, all their efforts came to nought.

The real actions of the authorities in general, including the authorities who called themselves revolutionary, collided with the real demands of the Revolution. These actions stalled the course

of the Revolution and encouraged the growth of the Counter-Revolution, which, in the repulsive form of the Kornilov movement, starkly confronted the toiling masses.

The toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion, having observed these facts during long months, now recognized that only the anarchist conception of the Revolution was capable of saving the Revolution and carrying it through to fulfilment. That's why, every time the uyezd Public Committee and the uyezd Government Commissar requested from Gulyai-Pole weekly reports about the development of revolutionary-social life in the raion, and also the remittance of taxes to be used to spread the propaganda of the Provisional Government, they received the answer that through the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution the whole bourgeois element in the raion had been disarmed and all rights to private property in land, factories, workshops, and other enterprises of the raion had been declared null and void. "Everything must belong to everyone, and not to some clique of idle parasites" ... (from the Minutes No. 3, Book 2, Committee for the Defence of the Revolution in Gulyai-Pole, 1917).

# Chapter 13: Struggle with the Counter-Revolution. Going to the villages

Thus the bourgeoisie was disarmed and its weapons were distributed among the revolutionary peasants. The disarmament took place without any blood being spilled.

A Congress of Raion Soviets was convened with the purpose of examining the causes and goals of General Kornilov's movement.

The Congress welcomed the election by the Gulyai-Pole Soviet and other organizations of the "Committee for the Defence of the Revolution", as well as all its actions up to the time the Congress was convened. The Congress expressed the conviction that the time for such actions had arrived.

Reviewing the Kornilov attack on Petrograd, which had already been suppressed, the Congress once more emphasized that it considered the dismantling of the External Front a crime because this Front was necessary to defend the Revolution against the exterior enemy. The Congress encouraged all toilers to root out the Kornilov movement in their midst.

The Congress dealt with some other questions, approved the declaration of the abolition of private property in our raion, and discussed the agrarian question.

The Anarchist Communist Group proposed to the Congress to make its own report on the agrarian question. This report was presented by Comrades Krat and Andrei Semenyuta. It was concerned mainly with practical measures for liquidating the rights of the pomeshchiks and kulaks to ownership of land, especially fabulously large estates which they couldn't possibly work with their own hands. The Group proposed to immediately expropriate the land and to convert the estates into free agrarian communes. The pomeshchiks and kulaks were to be given an opportunity to be part of these communes. But if they refused to become members of the family of free toilers and wished to work individually for themselves, then they would be assigned a portion of the people's wealth appropriate for their labour power. In this way they would have the means of making a living while working separately from the free agrarian communes of the rest of the toilers.

The Congress summoned representatives of the Gulyai-Pole Land Committee and asked them to make a report explaining what this Committee had been doing about the land question. Comrade Krat was a member of the Land Committee. With the approval of the other Committee members he reported what had been undertaken by the Committee in this field, emphasizing that the Committee was in accord with the position just set forth by the Anarchist Communist Group. He noted that this position had been placed on the agenda of the Raion Congress of Land Committees by the Gulyai-Pole representatives and that this Congress had adopted it as the basis for arriving at a solution of the land question.

The Congress of Soviets, with the full participation (as I have already mentioned) of the Soviet of the Trade Union, the Land Committee, and the Anarchist Communist Group, discussed these two reports with full awareness of its revolutionary duty towards the oppressed toilers, who had

only just decided to rid themselves of their oppressors by revolutionary means. The resolution passed by the Congress on this question reads:

“The Gulyai-Pole Raion Congress of Toilers firmly condemns the pretensions of the Provisional Government in Petrograd and the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kiev to direct the life of the toilers and invites the local soviets and the whole organized proletarian population to ignore any orders of these governments.

The people must be in charge of their own lives. The time has finally come to realize this age-old dream. From now on, all the land, the factories, and the workshops must belong to the toilers.

The labouring peasantry must be masters of the land, and the workers must be masters of the factories and workshops.

Before the peasants stands the task — to expel all the pomeshchiks and kulaks who don’t want to contribute their own labour from their estates and organize free agrarian communes on these estates, communes composed of volunteer peasants and workers. The Congress recognizes that the initiator of this approach is the Anarchist Communist Group and charges the Group with carrying it through.

The Congress hopes that the local Soviets and Land Committees will provide the Group with all the technical means at their disposal for the carrying through of this project.”

Then the Congress expressed its conviction that the consolidation of the conquests of the Revolution by the toilers, in the face of the opposition of their enemies, would immediately lead to, not just in our raion but in the whole of Ukraine and Russia, the total expropriation of all collective enterprises so that the labouring population could enjoy the fruits of their labour instead of the bourgeoisie and the State.

As the Congress was winding down, the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution received a bunch of telephonograms from a whole series of raions which had been loyal to the authorities in Aleksandrovsk. These messages said agents of the Aleksandrovsk Uyezd Public Committee, the Uyezd Soviet, and the government commissar had been trolling the villages and countryside, holding meetings and urging the peasants to boycott the Congress of Soviets in Gulyai-Pole. The reason given was that the Congress was deciding questions which no one had the right to decide before the Constituent Assembly convened.... . They declared that the Congress in Gulyai-Pole, although passing itself off as a peasant congress, was actually making decisions that would harm the peasants.... . That the leaders of the Congress were sworn enemies of the peasants who did not understand the laws of the Revolution which is why they had repudiated the Provisional “Revolutionary” Government (with Kerensky at the top) and the Constituent Assembly (the supreme revolutionary tribunal) ...

I added to these messages a directive received by the Gulyai-Pole Public Committee from the Government Uyezd Commissar which demanded the removal of N. Makhno from any organizing activities in Gulyai-Pole: he was, it seems, to be brought to trial in connection with the disarming of the pomeshchiks and kulaks.

After listening to these messages, the Congress convoked the executive of the Gulyai-Pole Public Committee and asked them to participate in critiquing these missives, in particular the demand of the commissar that I be relieved of any organizing duties.

After a storm of indignation directed at the Government commissar and the Government agents who were roaming the countryside, the Congress passed the following resolution:

“The Gulyai-Pole Congress of Soviets, as well as the Gulyai-Pole Soviet itself, do not recognize, either for themselves or for the toilers who have invested them with full powers, any sanctions, either of the Government Commissar, or the Public Committee of Aleksandrovsk; and the anarchist Makhno they consider above all their friend and mentor in revolutionary and organizing activities.

The former Gulyai-Pole Peasants’ Union sent the anarchist N. Makhno and six other members to the Gulyai-Pole Public Committee to exercise firm control over its work. After the reorganization of the Union into the Peasants’ Soviet, these appointments were confirmed. This Congress also supports these appointments and protests against the impertinent interference of the Uyezd Public Committee and the Government Commissar in local working class affairs.”

This resolution (Book No. 2 in the minutes of the Congress) I sent off to the government commissar Citizen B. K. Mikhno. However this was not the end of the matter. The Anarchist Communist Group asked the Congress for a recess of two hours during the last sitting of the Congress, after which the Group intended to make a very important report about the current state of affairs. The Congress in fact recessed for three hours, during which the delegates engaged in many private conversations. Meanwhile the members of our Group held a meeting at which myself and Comrade Antonov were charged with presenting a report to the Congress about “the counter-revolution in Aleksandrovsk and its uyezd”. The Congress session resumed. The report was presented.

I find it inappropriate to recount here the ideas contained in the report, but I wish fervently that those who dismiss the peasants without knowing them could be present at such a meeting where reports are given on behalf of our anarchist groups of peasants and workers. The reaction of the peasants to these reports is quite instructive and gives a good sense of their psychology. Those smug, superior-feeling observers would learn once and for all that revolutionary peasant toilers require no external advice or authorization when it comes to arranging their own independence and their own productive activities in the revolutionary process. It is for us to go to the peasants humbly and try to understand them.

After hearing the report of our Group, the Congress passed the following resolution:

“The Congress of Toilers of Gulyai-Pole Raion charges the Gulyai-Pole Soviet of Peasants’ and Workers Deputies appoints two representatives from the Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group, Comrades N. Makhno and V. Antonov. These representatives, provided with appropriate official documentation, are charged with meeting with the factory and dock workers of Aleksandrovsk with the aim of finding out their real views on the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies elected by them in Aleksandrovsk. We, the peasants, need to have a clear understanding of the position of the city workers in relation to Executive Committee of their own Soviet, which is spreading the counter-revolution throughout the rural areas of the uyezd.

It is only in this way that we, the revolutionary peasantry, can correctly evaluate the relative strengths of the revolutionary forces and the forces of our enemies.”

*(From the minutes of the Congress of Toilers in Gulyai-Pole, September 1917).*

The Congress then discussed some other questions of current importance and charged the Gulyai-Pole Soviet with publishing all its resolutions and distributing them to all the local Soviets. This ended the work of the Congress.

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This attitude on the part of the revolutionary peasants towards the parasitic land barons, an attitude observed by us, the peasant-anarchists, for a duration of six months and confirmed in clear-cut fashion by the September Congress, still more consolidated the strength of our Group in the raion.

Henceforth the Anarchist Communist Group attracted more and more attention from all the Soviets and even the Public Committees. But this result was not achieved without growing pains. We expended a lot of effort in order to overcome, internally, resistance to the principle of a well-ordered organization. Our situation in the oppressed villages became firmly established only when the Group had set up a strong organization and when each move of its active members was made with the knowledge of the membership of the group as a whole. Our assignments were as follows:

*Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies:* V. Antonov, Sokruta, and Kalinichenko.

*Workshop Committees:* Petrovsky, Seregin, Mironov, G. Sharovsky, and L. Shnayder.

*Soviet of the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers and their Health Insurance Fund:* N. Makhno, Seregin, Antonov.

*Peasants' Soviet and the Land Committee:* A. Marchenko, A. Semenyuta, Prokofii Sharovksy, F. Krat, Isidor Lyuty, Pavel Korostelev, the brothers Makhno, Stepan Shepel, and Grigori Sereda.

In this way our group was unified around the goal of bringing our ideas to life. Each of us understood this and conscientiously took responsibility for their own work.

At the same time our group was drawn closer to the mass of toilers and was enabled to acquaint the toilers with the ideas of anarchism in the social sense of the term and of the need for vigilance with respect to the activities of the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada and its Secretariat at a time when these bodies were most detrimental to the practical goals of the Revolution.

The toilers of the raion declared openly to all and sundry that they were keeping a close eye on their oppressors and were prepared to take up arms against them.

From the end of August 1917 all the Public Committees of the raion began to protest against various government orders they had received. These protests were first discussed at local meetings. Then delegates were sent to Gulyai-Pole to consult with our group, and after this a final decision was arrived at.

However, in spite of the obvious revolutionary consciousness of the toilers, a consciousness which opened the way to full spiritual and material freedom and independence from authority, a freedom which the toilers strived to acquire at whatever cost, with their own blood if necessary, a freedom which they wished to feel in themselves and around themselves thereby realizing a

society without authority — in spite of this consciousness so strongly displayed by the toilers — the principle of the abolition of private property in land, factories, and workshops proclaimed by the Gulyai-Pole Committee for the Defence of the Revolution and confirmed by the Raion Congress of Toilers could not be fully realized in practice.

The Provisional Government, backed by Kerensky's allies (the Right S-Rs and the Mensheviks) and controlling the local state apparatus and the troops (which kept apart from the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion and knew nothing of their goals), ended up having the upper hand. The Government impeded the revolutionary impulse of the toilers who, with their demands for full liberty, had gone well beyond the programs of these political parties. The Government would not allow this healthy initiative to be brought to fruition.

It was thus that, temporarily at least, the privileges of the bourgeoisie shamefully triumphed over the revolutionary masses.

Those who marched under the banner of socialism and played at being socialists contributed incontestably to this result. The toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion, who had boldly tried to seize liberty and happiness, had to content themselves, this time, with not paying to the pomeshchiks the land rent and placing under the control of the Land Committees the land, equipment, and livestock so that the pomeshchiks couldn't sell them.

It was painful to see how all the toilers in the raion suffered with their physical powerlessness in comparison to the strength of their enemies. This powerlessness was quite obvious and the question was posed: where can one find strength? The toilers finally came to the conclusion that they could count only on themselves. They closed ranks, trying to create sufficient force to liberate all the toilers from the baleful tyranny of the State.

## Chapter 14: Visit to the factory workers of Aleksandrovsk

In spite of the reaction which reigned in all the government institutions and in the workers' Soviet of Aleksandrovsk towards the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion, the delegates of the Gulyai-Pole Soviet and the Congress, namely Comrade Antonov and myself, left for Aleksandrovsk with the aim of presenting to the factory workers a report on "the Counter-Revolution in the city and uyezd of Aleksandrovsk", because we were convinced that revolutionary Gulyai-Pole could have an impact in Aleksandrovsk.

The authorities received us with hostility but didn't dare hinder us from making an official tour of all the factories, plants, and workshops so we could let the workers know what the peasants were thinking and what measures they intended to take in their revolutionary work. At the same time we hoped to find out what the workers were thinking and what plans they were making for the future, surrounded as they were by the Counter-Revolution which, in the name of the workers, was extending its activity into the countryside.

The Gulyai-Pole Soviet and the Trade Union had promised that if the authorities took it into their heads to arrest us, they would launch a campaign against Aleksandrovsk.

When we arrived in Aleksandrovsk we first went to the Soviet and asked the executive to suggest the most expeditious way to arrange our tour of workplaces so that we wouldn't skip any place and wouldn't waste our time. In response to questioning from members of the executive as to what we were up to, we showed them our mandates and, after pondering a bit, they suggested an itinerary and stamped our mandates. But after leaving the Soviet we didn't follow their suggestions, but made our way instead to the Federation of Anarchists. There we picked up a guide and assistant in the person of the anarchist Comrade Nikiforova and all three of us headed out to visit the workplaces.

We presented our mandates to the factory and plant committees and right away they collected all the workers to hear our report from the peasants.

We spent several days visiting workplaces, making reports to the workers about activities being carried on in their name in the villages by the counter-revolution, activities which were being resisted by the peasants. The workers listened to us with rapt attention and passed their own resolutions of protest against the actions of their own Soviet. They thanked us and, through us, all the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion for our visit and for exposing to them these vile machinations which were being carried out in the uyezd by their own Soviet together with other government organizations.

At many of these sessions there appeared members of the Aleksandrovsk Soviet and the Public Committee, as well as agents of the Government Commissar and the Military Commissar himself, the S-Rs. Popov. All of these characters spoke out against our reports in an arrogant fashion, acting as if they were incontestably in charge of the situation.

However, they didn't prevail. The workers declared to them: "We don't trust you any more because, letting yourselves be run by the bourgeoisie, you have hidden from us a lot of stuff which is useful to the Revolution. You want us to support the Revolution but you don't want us to develop and broaden it."

On the evening of the third day we had one report left to make at the munitions workshops, formerly the Badovsky plant. We arrived at the gates of these workshops. At our request to the sentry to admit us to the Committee of Military Workshops, the sentry silently locked the gates in front of us. We shouted through the gates that we had come on behalf of the peasants to make a report to the military workers. The sentry called a member of the Military Committee who declared to us, through the gates, that the Committee knew about us but could not let us in to talk to the soldiers because the Military Commissar, the S-R Popov, had ordered that we were not to be admitted under any circumstances. At this time groups of soldiers began to gather in the courtyard behind the gates. I spoke to them directly: "Comrade soldiers, who's the boss here? Is the Commissar, elected by you to the Public Committee, the boss over you? Or does the Commissar answer to you? It's a disgrace, comrades, that you find yourselves in a situation where you aren't allowed to receive representatives of the peasants — they're your fathers and mothers, your brothers and sisters!"

Cries were heard from the soldiers: "Where's our Committee? Bring them here! The Committee must open the gates and let in the representatives of the peasants!... . Or else we'll let them in ourselves... ."

Five soldiers, bare-headed, ran up and opened the gates. We were let into their dining hall where they bombarded us with sensible questions about Gulyai-Pole and the activities there.

A dozen of them surrounded me and said: "We are mostly Left S-Rs and Bolsheviks, there are some anarchists here as well, but we are helpless. If we make the slightest move in a revolutionary sense the Military Commissar will immediately send us to the Front against the Germans and recruit new people to take our places. Help us if you can, Comrade Makhno. We would like to recall all the soldiers' representatives from the Soviet and the Public Committee and replace them with others who are closer to our ideas."

I told them we had been charged by the peasants to carry out a mission. "Since our mission coincides with your revolutionary ideas, you should rejoice at its success and try to contribute to it."

We began our report. The soldiers from the workshops avidly devoured each word, trying to understand everything correctly. They asked questions and openly expressed their joy.

When we invited the soldier-workers to form an organizational connection with the peasants of the uyezd through Gulyai-Pole raion and create a common revolutionary front against the Counter-Revolution, a cry was heard from the mass of soldiers: "Against what Counter-Revolution? All power is in the hands of the revolutionaries! Where can the Counter-Revolution arise?" This was none other than Military Commissar Popov, surrounded by his cohorts.

When Comrade Antonov responded to him that it was precisely this "revolutionary power" which was creating the Counter-Revolution, Commissar Popov, the S-R Martinov, and other socialists began to object violently. From this dispute it became clear that the military workshops were under the influence of the S-Rs and S-Ds. But this influence was not, strictly speaking, ideological, but authoritarian-statist. The mass of soldiers were divided into various political groupings of which the Right S-Rs and the Mensheviks (S-Ds) did not form the majority. But, if they expressed a revolutionary opinion even once (the soldiers told me this openly), they risked being

sent to the External Front. So they abstained from speaking out and submitted to the tyranny of the statist power of the Right S-Rs and Mensheviks. This domination of the SRs and SDs got me so worked up that I immediately asked the soldiers to recall these socialists from all the institutions and even expel any of them found in the workshops. I promised the soldiers to intervene at the Provincial Military Commissariat to ensure that their rights were not trampled on. At that time the head of the Commissariat was an anarcho-syndicalist, Comrade Grunbaum, a man with a strong revolutionary will and a good administrator. In the worst case scenario they must be prepared to defend their rights by force of arms in the street and they could count on Gulyai-Pole to support them.

My appeal filled the soldiers with enthusiasm. They wanted to kick the SRs and SDs out of the workshops right away. And if they had not been restrained by their revolutionary consciousness of their responsibility for the lives of these people, why they would have torn them in pieces. Actually it was only with great effort that we succeeded in preventing the soldiers from committing an act unworthy of revolutionaries and directed against other revolutionaries. (However the agents of the government and of these “revolutionaries” on July 3–5, 1917 murdered Comrade Asnin in Petrograd at the Durnovo dacha, as well as many other revolutionaries and anarchists.)

The soldier-workers of the military workshops passed a resolution in connection with our report about recalling their representatives from the Soviet and the Public Committee if these two organizations were not re-organized by all the workers. They also passed a resolution supporting the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion.... .

And when we left the workshops the soldiers asked us to tell the peasants that the soldiers would always support them in their struggle for liberty and requested them to send similar reports more often.

It was already late. Exhausted, we grabbed a hasty meal at the home of the comrade workers and returned to our rooms.

During the night the Government and Military Commissars — the pomeshchik Mikhno and the S-D Popov — gathered their forces and ordered the secret arrest of the anarchist Nikiforova because she had accompanied us in our meetings with the workers and didn’t enjoy the protection of a mandate from the peasants. The agents of the commissars quickly found her apartment and, seizing her, they took to prison in an automobile.

But, unfortunately for the commissars, the workers of Aleksandrovsk found out about the Nikiforova’s arrest first thing in the morning when they went to work. They immediately elected delegates and sent them to the commissars, empowering them to demand the immediate release of Nikiforova. The commissars avoided the workers’ delegates and couldn’t be found.

Then the workers of the factories, plants, and workshops abandoned their machines and, accompanied by the wailing of the plant sirens, marched on the Soviet under their banners, singing revolutionary songs.

As the workers were showing their revolutionary solidarity by marching on the Soviet, they encountered the President of the Soviet, the Social Democrat Mochalii and seized him. A delegation, elected on the spot, put the President in a horse-drawn cab and accompanied him to the prison to liberate the anarchist Nikiforova.

When the workers’ delegation, President Mochalii, and the anarchist Nikiforova arrived back from the prison at the procession which was marching along Cathedral Street, the workers grabbed Nikiforova and, passing her from hand to hand, bore her in triumph to the Soviet, congratulating her on her release and cursing the Provisional Government and all its agents.

None of the commissars dared show themselves at the tribune of the Soviet. Only the anarchist Nikiforova occupied this tribune and, with her powerful voice, urged the workers to struggle against the Government for the Revolution and for a society free of all authority.

We had finished our reports with an appeal to the workers to do something about the Aleksandrovsk Soviet which had gone too far in its anti-revolutionary activities. We knew what kind of organization it was from the behaviour of its agents in the villages and at congresses. Our reports predicted its fate. The arrogant act of the commissars towards our comrade anarchist was inexcusable both from a political and a tactical point of view and could only hasten the fall of this Soviet of Right S-Rs, Menshevik S-Ds, and Kadets.

The industrial workers were now confronted with the problem of how to re-elect the Soviet in the most expeditious manner. In the course of several days new elections were scheduled. The workers recalled all their former representatives and elected, in most cases, new people.

In this way a new Executive Committee of the Aleksandrovsk Soviet was formed.

This new Executive Committee was again composed not of workers interested directly in furthering their class interests, but of people who, while they were workers, were also by conviction very close to the Left S-Rs, and Bolsheviks, and even the anarchists. These newly-elected people divided themselves into fractions and, from the very first day of their entry into the Executive Committee, were guilty of distorting the meaning of Revolution among the working masses and, if it were not for the anarchists, would have ended up doing away with the essence of Revolution altogether.

However, this new Executive of the Aleksandrovsk Soviet at least did not support the clearly counter-revolutionary Public Committee of Aleksandrovsk uyezd and the Government Commisar in their demands to the Gulyai-Pole Public Committee to remove me from organizational work because of my role in disarming the bourgeoisie. Also the new Soviet did not insist on the return of the confiscated weapons.

The new Aleksandrovsk Soviet, like all the higher political institutions and administrations, felt the need to give each of its members a portfolio to carry under their arms as if they were going to decide the fate of the Revolution. And they met day after day elaborating rules for their own activities. The time for such work was propitious. This was the period when the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs agreed on many points and the question of forming a bloc arose. This question had not yet been posed by the leadership of either party but it was easy to predict a positive outcome.

Comrade Antonov and myself left Aleksandrovsk with regret. We would have liked to spend more time with the industrial workers of Aleksandrovsk, among whom were many well-known and devoted revolutionaries. They were outstanding members of their class and yet did not belong any political party. They sympathized with the anarchists. We would have liked to stay with them but we didn't have the right. We had begun organizational work among the peasants and we had to see it through. We returned to Gulyai-Pole.

Upon our return we called a meeting of all the Gulyai-Pole revolutionary, trade union, and social organizations and made a detailed report about our successes in Aleksandrovsk. Then we convened a general assembly of the whole working population of Gulyai-Pole and made a detailed report about the reception we got from the city workers and their reaction to our report to them about the counter-revolutionary activities going on in Aleksandrovsk and its uyezd. We also passed on the message from the soldier-workers of the munitions workshops. Our successes among the Aleksandrovsk workers invoked general rejoicing among the toiling population.

The revolutionary toilers thirsted for action.

I proposed to the peasants to designate reliable people who would be able to help the Land Committee to proceed immediately to dividing up the land belonging to the churches, the monasteries, and the pomeshchiks, because it was necessary to seed this land before winter or plough it in preparation for spring.

The peasants resolutely set about this work, but when they got out in the field and actually began to divide up the land, they realized that each peasant would have to keep, for that year at least, the land which he had ploughed and seeded with winter wheat. It was decided that each of these peasants should pay a certain sum to the community in order to maintain the public funds which provided for needs of the community, funds which would receive nothing that year from those peasants who had not been working.

In general the peasants took over the land which it was necessary to seed before winter and shared it out without paying the least attention to threats from government agents. A number of raions and uyezds followed the example of the peasants of Gulyai-Pole.

Our Anarchist Communist Group and members of the Gulyai-Pole Soviet sent out literature and agents over a wide area encouraging the peasants to follow our example. We hoped that the local successes of direct revolutionary action by the toilers would resolve the land question in a definitive and just manner before the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. At the same time we hoped also to predetermine the fate of private ownership of factories, plants, and other enterprises, so that the workers, following the example of the peasants, would not remain slaves of the owners of these social enterprises. We hoped they would declare them public property and put them under the direct control of their union plant committees and unions.

This would lead to the commencement of the struggle against the political power of the government (assuming that the anarchist groups in the cities were on the job) and thus the death of the principles of statism itself would become an accomplished fact in the life of the toilers. There would remain only one task: to bury these principles so deeply that they would never be resurrected.

In Gulyai-Pole and the surrounding territory public life took on a healthy character, to the great joy of the revolutionary anarchists, peasants, and workers.

## Chapter 15: The Provincial Soviet makes advances to Gulyai-Pole

While Comrade Antonov and myself were in Aleksandrovsk, the Executive Committee of the Ekaterinoslav Provincial Soviet of Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Deputies began to direct serious attention towards Gulyai-Pole. This Committee, politically astute, did not have recourse to repressions as is normally the case with inconsiderate and foolish revolutionary and counter-revolutionary politicians. Instead it resorted to "political wisdom": by-passing the uyezd level, it sent a proposal to the Gulyai-Pole Soviet to delegate its own permanent representative to the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets.

In the course of the discussion on this proposal, the Gulyai-Pole Soviet was astonished by the following circumstance: there was already a delegate from Gulyai-Pole on the Provincial Executive Committee – elected at the Provincial Congress. However, the Provincial Executive Committee was proposing that we send a second delegate directly from the Gulyai-Pole Soviet.

This proposal compelled our Soviet to review its past policies, according to which it had always determined its own role in revolutionary work and rejected the direction of higher bodies as incompatible with its understanding of the essence of revolution. Thus it seemed that our response to the Ekaterinoslav Provincial Soviet had, in principle, already been decided and merely needed to be formalized by means of a meeting and a resolution.

However, after we had referred to our original revolutionary views, we realized that they gave rise to problems in carrying revolutionary work in practice. We needed to form alliances with the industrial workers so that together we could claim the right to our heritage: the land, the factories, the plants, etc., and so that together we could exercise this right.

Guided by this idea, we found it mandatory to study the proposal of the Provincial Soviet from all points of view and try to understand what importance its acceptance or rejection would have for revolutionary work in Gulyai-Pole.

The proposition was submitted to serious discussion. Two questions required clarification: (1) the links generally of the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion with other raions which were also striving to broaden and deepen the revolutionary process; and (2) the possibility that direct representation on the Provincial Soviet would lead to a conflict of ideas in our ranks.

In the end it was clear that the influence of Gulyai-Pole raion was widespread in the region, and that Kamishevatsky raion was working energetically with us. Many raions from Berdyansk, Mariupol', Pavlograd, and Bakhmyt uyezds were sending us their delegates to learn our attitude towards the enemies of the revolution: the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada; also to find out how we were struggling to transfer all the land, factories, and workshops under the direct control of the peasant and worker organizations.

Moreover, the toilers of many raions of the mentioned uyezds had, by their actions. They had confirmed their solidarity with our ideas, confirmed that they shared our perspective on the land

question and on the necessity of doing away with the rule of the Public Committees. They stood for self-management of social affairs and demanded their right to put their ideas into action.

The Gulyai-Pole Soviet and the Anarchist Communist Group saw in this the fruits of their combined efforts. Under the influence of the idea of unity, the Soviet resolved the question about sending their representative to the Provincial Executive Committee in a positive sense: to send a capable, reliable comrade from the Anarchist-Communist Group.

The rationale for this positive resolution was given by the members of the Gulyai-Pole Soviet — peasants and workers — who were not members of the Group. They considered themselves revolutionaries and sympathized with the anarchists but remained embedded in the working class as excellent defenders of the rights of labour. The resolution could be summarized as follows:

“The toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion are totally committed to the expropriation of private property in the means of production and consumption for the benefit of working people. But we are not going to get carried away and do something foolish! We realize that this extraordinarily important question can only be solved successfully if expropriations are applied in several raions simultaneously, or, at the very least, separated by only very short intervals of time. That’s why it’s necessary that the Soviet, the Anarchist Communist Group, and the Trade Union, which are all sympathetic to our idea, use their influence to root this idea as firmly as possible in the consciousness of the masses in the raions close to Gulyai-Pole, because Gulyai-Pole will be needing support from these adjacent raions at the critical moment if the practical implementation of these ideas is to be spread to raions even further from Gulyai-Pole.

As the initiator of this great project, it falls to Gulyai-Pole to take a leadership role, which it can fulfil only if when the idea of expropriating personal property is firmly established in its own raion. From this point of view it is very important for the Gulyai-Pole Soviet to have direct representation by a capable comrade on the Provincial Executive Committee of the Soviets. The Anarchist Communist Group and the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers do not oppose this; on the contrary, they support it.”

Following this reasoning, both the Anarchist Communist Group and the Trade Union Executive spoke out at meeting of the Gulyai-Pole Soviet in favour of the decision to send their own representative to the Provincial Executive of the Soviets.

Since the Soviet insisted on sending a member of our Group, we chose Comrade Lev Schneider, an experienced working class organizer.

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It was a time of troubles. Kerensky threatened the leftists with reaction. Revolutionary anarchists had to be ready either to begin armed struggle against the Provisional Government or to disappear into the underground.

I knew perfectly well that our anarchist movement, because of the absence of a strong organization, was weak in the cities and in the countryside scarcely existed. Consequently, our anarchist group had to operate completely independently, as we had earlier decided, and be ready for anything.

Our Soviet provided Comrade L. Schneider with documents certifying that he was authorized to represent it on the Executive Committee of the Provincial Soviet. The Anarchist Communist Group gave him instructions about how to conduct himself and about working with the Ekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists. The Soviet of the Trade Union also empowered him to try to enter into negotiations with the Provincial Industrial Committee which was located in Ekaterinoslav. The purpose of this was to ensure that the foundries of Gulyai-Pole received the raw materials they needed in sufficient quantity and in a timely fashion so that work in the plants would not have to stop. Or if it did have to stop, then only in those branches which were least necessary for the population of Gulyai-Pole raion.

At the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets, Comrade Schneider was welcomed with open arms. But ... after one or two meetings of the Committee, and one or two speeches by Comrade Schneider — the attitude of the leaders of the Committee changed drastically. His position became difficult. Some members of the Committee raised the question of denying him the right to vote on decisions, leaving him with only a consultative role. Lev Schneider responded that he had never had the right to take part in the decisions of the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets because the Gulyai-Pole Soviet had not authorized him to do so. He had been delegated to the Committee only to keep informed of all new measures taken by the Committee in the revolutionary domain, and to acquaint the representatives of the toilers from other parts of the province with what was being accomplished by the toilers of Gulyai-Pole. In this way he hoped it would be possible to coordinate the self-activity of the toilers of the various uyezds or raions so as to fill in any gaps in a coordinated way.

After this frank declaration by Schneider of the motives which had brought him to the Provincial Executive Committee of Soviets from the Gulyai-Pole Soviet, numerous members of the Committee requested that an item be added to agenda demanding the complete exclusion of the representative of Gulyai-Pole.

However, the times were such that to exclude the representative from Gulyai-Pole would have provoked a boycott of the Provincial Executive by Gulyai-Pole and a number of revolutionary-minded raions adjacent to it. This would have demonstrated to the toiling masses of the whole province, and even well beyond its boundaries, that the Ekaterinoslav Provincial Executive was trailing the masses when it came to revolutionary action. A boycott at such a high-stress point in the Revolution would create serious problems, at least for politicians.

The Provincial Executive understood this very well and, grudgingly, allowed the representative of Gulyai-Pole to remain in its ranks, assigning him to a place in one of its sections. He ended up in the industrial section, if I am not mistaken.

Each week our representative came back to Gulyai-Pole to make reports to the Soviet, the Trade Union, and the Anarchist Communist Group. His reports were discussed. His strength renewed, he headed back to Ekaterinoslav for another week.

Through his mediation the Soviet of the Trade Union concluded an agreement with the Provincial Industrial Committee and began to receive vital raw materials for its plants.

The Raion Congress of Land Committees designated a number of properties of pomeshchiks to be turned into agrarian communes with the help of volunteers.

The toiling peasantry and workers, made up of people with the appropriate skills — often extended families or groups of neighbours — organized themselves into free agrarian communes ranging in size from 50 to 200 people. They had joy on their faces as they discussed among themselves what they must do before spring, what kind of wheat they should sow so as to give

the best harvest and, of course, help the Revolution, on condition that the weather was good, not too dry, with the rain necessary for our black earth at the right time in the spring and first two months of summer.

“Sowing all the land with a good grain, followed by an abundant harvest, will allow us to overcome the devastations of war and support the forces of the Revolution as they work in our best interests,” said the peasants.

And when the anarchists put this question to them: “What about the Provisional Government in Petrograd and the Central Rada in Kiev? They are the direct enemies of this Revolution which you are striving to support.” The answer was always the same, delivered with revolutionary emotion: “But we are organizing ourselves precisely to overthrow the Provisional Government and not allow the Central Rada to triumph. We hope that by the time spring rolls around we will have done with all governments.”

And sometimes we asked: “Who’s going to do this — you?”

“We, the peasants and workers. You went to Aleksandrovsk and were able to see that the workers want to live, like us, free and independent of any kind of rulers over our heads.”

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In September, during our organizing work among the peasants and workers, the Government Commissar, the pomeshchik Mikhno, sent to Gulyai-Pole an official charged with conducting an investigation of me and the other peasants and workers who had disarmed the bourgeoisie of the raion.

This official set up shop in the office of the Militia and told the Militia to summon all these peasants and workers, including myself, so he could interrogate them one at a time.

There I sat him on a chair and asked him to explain as calmly as possible the reason for his presence in Gulyai-Pole. He tried his best to give me explanations in a calm manner but, for reasons I can’t imagine, he didn’t manage at all: his lips trembled, his teeth clattered, he face alternated between red and white, and his eyes were fixed on the floor.

Then I asked him to compose himself and write down what I was going to dictate to him. And when he, holding his pen with great difficulty, had written down what I said, I gave him 20 minutes to get out of Gulyai-Pole and two hours to leave the borders of the raion. And the official indeed left very quickly, astonishing the Committee and myself with his speed, as he returned to his boss in Aleksandrovsk.

After this Gulyai-Pole no longer received any external orders, nor any special envoys from Aleksandrovsk.

## **Part II**

# Chapter 16: October coup d'état in Russia

Repercussions of the October coup d'état — in Petrograd and Moscow, and then in the whole of Russia — reached us in Ukraine only at the end of November and the beginning of December, 1917.

Up until December 1917 the Ukrainian toilers, both urban and rural, knew of the October coup d'état only through the manifestoes of the All-Russian Executive Committee of Soviets, the Soviet of People's Commissars, and revolutionary parties and groups. Two parties in particular were prominent: the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. For these two parties knew how to benefit from this period in the Russian Revolution to attain their goals. This was a vast uprising of workers, soldiers, and peasants against the Provisional Government, against its disgraceful, but feeble, attacks against the Revolution. The foundations of this uprising had been laid by all the revolutionary groups which had found a place in the great current that was the Russian Revolution.

But these two parties — the one, well-organized; the other, submissively following the crafty Lenin — knew how and when to approach the revolutionary masses, enticing them with their lying slogan: "All Power to the Soviets" and congratulating the masses for their slogan "The Land to the Peasants, the Factories to the Workers". These parties took over the Revolution and, having at their disposal an abundance of paper and printing presses, they papered town and country with their manifestoes, declarations, and programs.

The anarchists played an outstanding role in this insurrection in Petrograd, Moscow, and a series of other industrial centres. They were in the vanguard of the sailors, soldiers, and workers. But, being disorganized, they could not compete in influence with these two political parties, forming a bloc under the direction of the crafty Lenin. They knew exactly what they had to do during these days and months and what sort of forces and energy were required. Their voice was heard throughout the country loud and clear, echoing the age-old aspirations of the labouring masses: the conquest of the land, bread, and freedom.

Meanwhile the anarchists, totally uncoordinated, were not able even to show the masses the basic hypocrisy of these two political parties, constructing their own rule over the Revolution while spouting slogans which were anti-statist in essence, quite alien to their authoritarian ideals.

The toiling masses, during the period when the Provisional Government and its direct agents, the Right S-Rs and Kadets, were carrying out counter-revolutionary acts, saw the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs as champions of the goals of labour. That they were full of political cunning the masses did not notice. Only the anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists would have been able to jolt the masses into taking a closer look at these parties. But, following their old tradition, the anarchists before the Revolution did not bother to unite their different groups into a powerful organization. And once the Revolution had begun, they were too busy, either among the workers or in their newspaper offices to think seriously about their lack of self-discipline and the necessity of creating an organization which would allow them to influence the course of events in the country.

It's true that some time after the Revolution began anarchist federations and confederations sprang up. But the October events showed that they had not been able to cope with events. It would seem that perceptive anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists should immediately set about re-evaluating the form of their organizations, coming up with something more stable and more in tune with the momentum of the Revolution.

Alas! This didn't happen! And because of this (and a bunch of other reasons as well) the anarchist movement, so lively and full of revolutionary enthusiasm, found itself trailing events and even, at times, completely shunted to the sidelines, unable to follow an independent path and enrich the Revolution with its ideas and tactics.

Thus, the October revolutionary events, events which cleared the way for the Second Great Russian Revolution, really began to make themselves felt in Ukraine only in December 1917.

During the period from October to December, in the cities and villages of Ukraine took place the transformation of the Public Committees (of these territorial units) into *Zemstvo* Boards. Now it's true that participation of the toilers in this re-organization was minimal and purely formal. In many raions the representatives of the peasants on the Public Committees were dropped from the *Zemstvo* Boards. In many places the Public Committee was simply re-named the *Zemstvo* Board without undergoing any change in its structure. But officially the whole country was divided up into territorial units under *Zemstvo* Boards.

Part of the urban proletarian had gradually taken on a passive, wait-and-see attitude.

The peasants found the moment auspicious for overthrowing the ruling powers and taking their destiny into their own hands. The peasants of Zaporozh'e and Preazov followed the October coup with great interest as it spread across central Russia in the form of armed attacks against the adherents of Kerensky's rule. They saw the beginning of what they had been attempting themselves in their villages in August and September. That's why the peasants welcomed the coup and tried to promote it in their own areas. Any other motives tending to bring together the peasants and that part of the workers who rejected passivity and supported the coup did not exist. Thus revolutionary Ukrainian toilers of both town and country reacted joyfully to the October coup as they encountered it through manifestos and newspapers. However, the Ukrainian revolutionary toilers were not enthused by the fact the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs were now in power. The class-conscious peasants and workers saw in this a new phase of intervention by the central authorities in the revolutionary creativity of the toilers at the local level, and consequently a new war between central power and the people. As for the mass of Ukrainian toilers, the peasants of the downtrodden villages in particular, they saw in this new revolutionary socialist government only a government like all governments, which they only had occasion to notice when it despoiled them with its various taxes, when it conscripted soldiers, or intervened with other acts of violence in their arduous lives. One would often hear the peasants express their true opinion of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary authorities. They seemed to be joking, but they were actually speaking seriously from a background of suffering and hatred when they said that after they had driven the fool Nicholas Romanov from power, Kerensky had then played the fool. Now that he had been chased, "Who will now play the fool at our expense?"

"Lord Lenin," said some.

Others said, "Without the 'fool' we couldn't manage." (By the word 'fool' they always meant the government.)

"Cities only exist for this — their idea, their system is bad. They bring into existence this 'fool,'" said the peasants.

In reality, the crafty Lenin correctly understood the city. He placed in the position of “fool” a group of people, under the banner of the dictatorship of the proletariat, who got it into their heads that they knew what they were doing, but who only wanted power for its own sake so they could impose their will on other people and in fact on the whole human race.

The crafty Lenin raised the role of “fool” to heights previously unknown and thus attracted not only members of the political party closest to his own in their revolutionary activity and historical militancy — the Left SRs who became his half-convinced disciples — but also some of the anarchists. It’s true, these offspring of the old party of Socialist-Revolutionaries — the Left SRs — after 7 or 8 months as Lenin’s lackeys came to their senses and went into opposition against Lenin even to the point of taking up arms against him. But this by no means changes our evaluation of them mentioned above.

# **Chapter 17: Elections to the Constituent Assembly; our attitude towards the party strife**

Being hostile to the very concept of a Constituent Assembly, our Group was naturally hostile to the election of its delegates.

Influenced by the agitational work of our group, the toiling population of the raion was, on the whole, also hostile to the idea of the Constituent Assembly. However, many of them took part in the elections. This is explained by the fact that the socialist parties — the Left and Right S-Rs, Bolsheviks, and Mensheviks — as well as the powerful Kadet Party — conducted a furious campaign throughout the country on behalf of their lists of candidates. Under the influence of this propaganda, the population of the country divided up into numerous groups, thereby completely destroying its unity and even found itself divided on the question of socialization of the land. This was playing into the hands of the Kadets and Mensheviks who at that time stood for making the peasants buy back their land.

Our Group, after studying the activities of all the above-mentioned parties, activities which threatened to destroy the unity of the toilers, favoured the S-Rs and Bolsheviks over the Kadets and Mensheviks. As a result we refrained from actively pursuing a boycott of the elections at that time. We recommended to those members who wanted to take part in the meetings organized by the political parties to advise the toilers that if any of them had faith in the Constituent Assembly and wished to participate in the election of delegates to it, they should vote for the Socialist-Revolutionaries (the Left and Right SRs put forward one list — No. 3) or for the Bolsheviks (No. 9).

Although the elections in Ukraine had numerous lists of candidates, only three were of interest to the toilers: No. 3 — the S-Rs; No. 5 — the “Ukrainian list”, i.e. a mishmash of socialist-chauvinists and nationalists; and No. 9 — the Bolsheviks. The lists of S-Rs and Bolsheviks enjoyed enormous success in areas where the toiling population participated fully in the electoral campaign. No. 5, the “Ukrainian” list, had less success in Left-Bank Ukraine than either No. 3 or No. 9.

The success of the left-wing socialist parties in the elections can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that the Ukrainian labouring population, not deformed by the politics of the nationalists, preserved its inherent revolutionary spirit, and voted for revolutionary parties. On the other hand, there was the reality that the idea of Ukrainian liberation was based on bourgeois-nationalist self-determination, rather than the autonomy of working people. This idea of the bourgeoisie, anachronistic in the twentieth century, was resuscitated by irresponsible people who even stuck socialist labels on themselves and tried to “talk socialist”. But this didn’t change the essence of the matter: the question of “Ukrainian liberation” remained locked into a chauvinist framework. The heads of this “movement” were a really ill-assorted bunch, with the exception

of two or three people who also eventually sold out to German militarism and ended up marching against the Revolution. Often the most responsible posts were filled with people who could speak Ukrainian but really had no business being in the ranks of a movement which liberatory aspirations.

The spirit of the “Ukrainian Liberation Movement” was bourgeois and chauvinist through and through. Its leaders behaved reprehensibly towards the toilers who had set out by direct action to win liberty, the right to independence, and the construction of a free society. As a result the idea of a “Ukrainian Liberation Movement” aroused the hatred of the Ukrainian revolutionary toilers. They saw through it from the beginning and moved against it, showing no pity to anything touched by it. After two or three months of active struggle against the Ukrainian nationalist movement, the Great Russian Revolution began and the toilers could see that they were right to struggle against the nationalists so quickly and with such intensity.

I don’t really want to take up any more space in this memoir dissecting the Ukrainian Liberation Movement, which caused so much harm to the Revolution. I want to move on to reporting on the effect of the October coup after its triumph in Petrograd and Moscow. It exerted an influence almost immediately on the revolutionary toilers of Zaporozh’e and Preazov, in particular. This included the following raions which were linked ideologically with the Gulyai-Pole Soviet and looked to it for guidance in the struggle against the government and the widening and deepening of the revolutionary process: Aleksandrovsk, Melitopol’, Berdyansk, Mariupol’, Bakhmut, and Pavlograd.

Having followed closely the everyday goings on in these raions, I can confirm that in November and December the triumph of the coup in Russia was greeted by the Ukrainian toilers with great joy. They in no way changed their own local activities because they recognized that the Coup was based on the ideas of the real Revolution, which came from the awakening of the oppressed villages and enslaved cities.

Up until October, Gulyai-Pole raion had tried to make its mark on the Revolution in a deep and deliberate manner – completely devoid of any statist concepts. Then at the end of November 1917 four official governments were organized in Ekaterinoslav, each pretending to rule the revolutionary masses of the whole province. They proceeded to bad-mouth each other and then started to fight among themselves, dragging the toilers into the fray. Gulyai-Pole raion completely avoided taking sides in these struggles in which one government or the other temporarily triumphed.

At the beginning of December the bloc of Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs got the upper hand in Ekaterinoslav. Gulyai-Pole raion recognized these parties as revolutionary and immediately came up with an analysis their revolutionary value.

The toilers said: “We consider the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs to be revolutionary because of their activities during the Revolution. We congratulate them as staunch militants. But we don’t trust them in power. They triumphed on our backs over the bourgeoisie which tried to kill the Revolution with the support of right-wing socialist groupings. And then the Bolsheviks and Left S-Rs set up their own government which smells just the same as any other government, the likes of which have been stifling us for centuries. And it doesn’t look like this new government is in any hurry to establish local self-management for the toilers so they won’t be at the mercy of the bosses.

"Everywhere commissariats are being established. And these commissariats have a police-like character rather than being egalitarian institutions composed of comrades seeking to explain to us the best way to organize ourselves so that we will be independent and not have to listen to the bosses who up to now have lived on our backs and done us nothing but harm.

Since this revolutionary government shows no egalitarian tendencies, since on the contrary it is consolidating police-like institutions, then in the future we can expect, instead of advice, only the peremptory orders of the bosses. Anyone thinking independently and acting contrary to the orders received will be faced with death or deprived of their freedom, which we value above all else."

The toilers offered this analysis which, although vague in details, expressed the truth that by means of their sacrifices events had taken place in which one evil system was overthrown and another installed in its place under various pretexts.

The fact that the toiling masses of Ukraine understood the aspirations of the various political parties allowed them to reject the right-wing socialists and ally themselves with those groups which they saw moving in the same direction. In the vanguard they saw the Bolsheviks, Left S-Rs, and anarchists. But the first two socialist groupings knew what they needed to do at the given moment; moreover they had concluded an alliance which meant that they acted perfectly in unison. This made them stand out in the eyes of the toilers who referred to them under one name — "Bolsheviks" — a name under which all the revolutionaries were merged, including the anarchists.

The masses of toilers looked at this complex of groupings standing in their vanguard and said: "We welcome these revolutionaries, but we don't have enough information to say they won't end up fighting among themselves for the right to take power over us and subject us entirely to their will. This tendency certainly exists among them which could lead them to unleash a new war while we, the toilers, with our right to autonomous action on behalf of revolutionary interests, are relegated to the sidelines and forced to submit to the egotistical, criminal interests of parties."

This forced the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Pole to be even more vigilant than usual.

## Chapter 18: Provincial Congress

Before the December Provincial Congress of Soviets of Peasants', Workers', and Soldiers' Deputies, an assembly of the Soviet of Gulyai-Pole raion was organized. All the delegates present at this assembly insisted that our representatives at the Provincial Congress be prepared not to fall under the influence of the agents of political parties. Our representatives were to declare, without hesitating, that they had come to the Congress, not in order to listen to reports of government agents and to obey them, but to read their own reports about what the toilers were doing locally and why they were doing it. And they were to explain why, in the future, they would not be following orders imposed from above.

The delegates which we elected to the Provincial Congress were to make explicit the idea which formed the basis of our actions, namely that at this moment in the Revolution the problem of first importance for all toilers was moving forward to full liberation from the power of the two authorities which oppressed us — private Capital and the State.

The State as political power, as the organization of society, cannot exist without oppression, pillage, and murder; it must die under the blows of the revolutionary toilers who are advancing passionately and in unity towards a new free society.

The agenda of the Provincial Congress was known to us. There was nothing new in it for our raion, for we had already instituted the measures mentioned there some time ago. Our delegates were to note this fact to the peasant and worker delegates from other raions. Our position in practice flowed naturally from our ideas. We needed to make this widely known so that the toilers of the whole country would understand what we were doing.

After the assembly had laid out these guidelines, there were nominations of candidates. Elected were N. Makhno and Mironov.

The assembly then expressed its thanks to its representatives for accepting its mandates, saying: "You have been elected, Comrades, with the full consent of those who sent us here. In your persons we are sending to the Provincial Congress the first among equals of the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion.

"We have no doubt that you will fulfil with distinction your mission to the Provincial Congress. The instructions we are giving you don't go into details. The fact that we are giving you instructions at all is just our traditional way of doing things. It helps to unite us on the road to more revolutionary conquests."

Such instructions and such parting words were customary in Gulyai-Pole when delegates were elected to the uyezd and provincial congresses.

If I dwell on this election of representatives, it is because it took place at a time when the Left Bloc had taken power over the inhabitants of the city of Ekaterinoslav and its environs. Gradually they concentrated in their own hands, to their own benefit, all the popular conquests of the Revolution. They were trying to deform the Revolution itself.

The toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion were well aware that the December Provincial Congress would be dominated by agents of the Left Bloc, who from time to time would let slip their state-

power aspirations. That's why the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Pole frequently spoke at their own meetings about the necessity to use caution and not rely on the bloc of revolutionary parties. There was a certain odour about them which aroused vigilance. Gulyai-Pole warned the toilers of other regions as well.

On the way to Ekaterinoslav, our train was derailed so we arrived a day late. However, we didn't miss the opening of the Congress. The delegates were all there, but the Congress had not yet started. Among the organizers of the Congress one sensed a certain malaise, a certain anxiety.

As I mentioned earlier, there existed at that moment in Ekaterinoslav four or five independent municipal administrations: (1) the one left over from the Kerensky regime; (2) the Ukrainian one claiming allegiance to the Central Rada; (3) a group of neutral citizens; (4) a unique administration of sailors from Kronstadt who were on their way by train to fight Kaledin and had stopped in Ekaterinoslav for a rest; (5) the administration of Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies. At the head of the latter at that time stood the anarcho-syndicalist Comrade Grunbaum, a very tactful man with an iron revolutionary will; unfortunately, at that period he was working for the Bolshevik-Left SR Bloc. Grunbaum's authority was dominant, at least in his negotiations with the commanders of the "Ukrainian" units put together from the former Preobrazhensky, Pavlovsky, and Semenovsky regiments (which had just arrived from Petrograd and were stationed in Ekaterinoslav). If Grunbaum had not been conducting these negotiations himself, the Bolshevik leaders — Kviring, Gopner, and Epstein, and also the Left SR Popov and others, would not have been able to get anywhere and would have been driven out of Yekaterinoslav.

The times were such that everything depended upon the force of arms. That force was concentrated in the "Ukrainian" troops and units made up of workers and other inhabitants of the city. Comrade Grunbaum was able to convince the Left Bloc high command to supply troops to support the Soviet which thereby became strong enough to convene the Provincial Congress.

It was typical that while things were dicey the Bolsheviks and Left-SR faded into the background, letting Comrade Grunbaum front for them, and, once things had settled down a bit, they came to the forefront again and took charge of the Provincial Congress.

The Congress finally got going after lunch. On the next day I took the floor with my report from Gulyai-Pole. In passing, I took a shot at the Ukrainian nationalists for their baseless actions in the name of their provincial "Peasants' Union", pointing out to the Congress that there were a number of raions where the peasantry did not recognize the politics of this "Union".

My speech raised the ire of the nationalists. Seven of them protested to the Congress, saying that the Congress was convened on an illegal basis. They said that raions and uyezds should not be sending their peasant and worker representatives to this Congress — the only legal delegates were those elected at uyezd congresses. They demanded that the delegates from Gulyai-Pole not be allowed to speak at the Congress, but be present only as observers.

The peasant delegates, also the Bolshevik leaders Kviring and Epstein, spoke against this demand by the Ukrainian nationalists. The Congress voted it down.

Then the nationalists demonstratively got up and left the meeting hall. They were followed by their supporters, delegates from the soldiers.

The Congress took a break for three or four hours. It turned out that the "Ukrainian Provincial Revolutionary Council" had held an emergency meeting on the question: whether or not to dissolve the Congress and take up arms against the Soviet. At this meeting, the chair of the "Revolutionary Council", Dr. Feldman, noted that their strength might not be sufficient and they could well be beaten.

The Congress was troubled by the notion that at any minute blood could be flowing in the streets of Ekaterinoslav. So the Congress sent its own people to the soldiers' barracks — to clarify their attitude towards the Congress. Comrade Grunbaum, supported by the Ekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists, again played a key role in countering the nationalists. The anarchist sailors from Kronstadt also supported the delegates of the Congress on this day by speaking before the regiments, and also before the workers in the factories.

At that time in Ekaterinoslav was stationed one regiment of the Cavaliers of St. George. This regiment had always hissed the orators sent to them from the Bolsheviks. The Congress sent me and Comrade L. Azersk to address this regiment in their barracks. We were going to try to get them to pass a resolution about the Ukrainian nationalists who were trying to disrupt the Congress and also to discuss a few essential points with a view to joint action.

I didn't want to be hissed. During nine months of revolution I had spoken to many audiences and had never been hissed. Now the Bolsheviks impressed on me that I was going to be hissed. I was apprehensive but I considered it inappropriate to refuse to carry out this mission for the Congress. We set out. We got in a cab. We arrived at the regiment and found the regimental committee. We met the chairman and presented our mandate from the Congress.

The chairman of the regiment read our mandate and, politely offering us chairs, left to gather the soldiers for a meeting.

After 15 or 20 minutes he came back and told us that everybody had been assembled.

At the door of the committee office we were met by two comrade anarchists — sailors from Kronstadt — and the four of us went to meet the soldiers.

At the meeting we basically argued with the officers, causing one of them to break down weeping and rip off his epaulets, and we got the regiment to pass its own resolution, which declared that "the regiment of the Cavaliers of St. George would defend by force of arms against any attack on the Provincial Congress of Peasants and Workers which started its work on December 2, 1917."

Analogous resolutions were passed by other regiments and squadrons.

This result was unexpected not so much by the Congress as by the Bolsheviks. All the delegates of the Congress were glad that the regular troops were on their side.

The Congress took up its work again and was finished in three days.

It was characteristic of this Congress that all the decisions set out in its resolutions had already been put into practice in Gulyai-Pole raion for three or four months. Only one clause was new to us because we had attached little importance to it: the right of local soviets to a subsidy from the state. I must admit that the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs caught a lot of people with this bait. For Gulyai-Pole raion this innovation was unacceptable because it based its own work on anti-statist ideas and tried to be independent of central authorities who tried to control everything.

# Chapter 19: Counter-Revolution of the Ukrainian Central Rada

At the end of the Congress, the delegates dispersed to their homes. We, Comrade Mironov and I, went to the Anarchist Federation with the intention of finding some good propagandists we could take back with us to the countryside. The Federation was in a better state than when I visited it in August while attending the Provincial Congress of Peasants and Workers. At that time I visited its various sections (the club, etc.). The Federation was still rather weak — it was barely able to tend to the city and its adjacent settlements — Amur, Nizhne-Dneprovsk, and Kaidaki. And yet the Federation was rich in armaments: carbines, rifles, and cartridges. In view of the unusual situation holding sway in the city, the Bolshevik — Left-SR authorities had freely issued weapons to the Ekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists, without any control whatsoever.

The Bloc saw the Federation of Anarchists as true revolutionaries who spurned the Ukrainian nationalists, backed up as they were by the bourgeoisie and generally in the camp of the Counter-Revolution. The Bloc used the enthusiasm, firm belief, and devotion to the Revolution of the Ekaterinoslav anarchists in every serious revolutionary crisis.

Having these weapons at its disposal, the Federation issued several boxes of rifles to us for the Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group. We loaded these weapons on the train and travelled back to Gulyai-Pole.

In Gulyai-Pole we made a series of reports about the Congress and all the obstacles which stood in its way. Subsequently we made similar reports in other villages and settlements.

From this time Gulyai-Pole raion began to arm itself in earnest and exercise vigilance towards the new revolutionary masters. The notion that these new masters — the Bolsheviks and the Left S-Rs — would also hinder the creative development of free thought and action by the toilers of the oppressed villages little by little began to be confirmed even in the minds of those toilers who wanted to believe in the Left Bloc.

The peasants and workers learned from their delegates that the Bolshevik Epstein stated at the Congress: “The urban proletariat has come to power and one must hope that it will create its own state — a Proletarian State. We, the Bolsheviks, will devote all our strength to helping it create such a State, because this is the only way the proletariat will achieve the happiness it seeks.”

The toilers of Gulyai-Pole interpreted these words as saying that the Bolshevik Party, abandoning all scruples, would build its own “proletarian” State at the expense of the peasants. They began anxiously to follow the course of events in the cities.

In the villages, the peasants began to teach each other how to handle rifle.

“Our enemies, the authorities,” they said, “are armed, and if they decide to deprive us of our right to an independent existence and the right to create new social structures, then they will launch an attack on us. Consequently, we must be prepared to reply in kind.”

So the peasants prepared. In Gulyai-Pole itself there were people from the poor peasantry who had received serious military training. They took young people out into the fields and taught them shooting, manoeuvres, etc.

Among those who knew how to handle weapons and were always ready to share this knowledge with others, one stood out especially — Yakov Domashenko. He inspired both young and old and stuck with the peasants till the very end. When armed struggle broke out, he was several times wounded in battle, fighting with the peasants for Bread and Liberty.

Events were developing rapidly.

Every day we heard rumours that the Ukrainian Central Rada could not come to an agreement with the Left Bloc (over who would be in charge) and, dragging the toiling masses into the fray, they were going to embark on a bloody struggle against the Bloc.

In Gulyai-Pole and its raion more and more often appeared dozens of agents of the Central Rada, who preached “perpetual war with the katzaps”.

The inhabitants of the raion became even more anxious.

Representative from the villages and hamlets of the raion daily appeared in Gulyai-Pole at the office of the Anarchist Communist Group in the building of the Soviet of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. They consulted with the anarchists and with the Soviet about what to prepare for in the near future, what they needed to do to preserve their right to land, bread, and liberty which might be curtailed by the programs of one or other government.

The Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group equipped two of its members — N. Makhno and Antonov — so they could travel round the whole raion and share with the population the opinion of our group about what was troubling them.

Simultaneously, the Group pressured the Soviet (through our members N. Makhno, Sokruta, Kalinichenko, Antonov, Seregin, and Krat) to send their members from outlying districts back home to find out the mood of the inhabitants. They were also to inform people about what was happening at the Soviet and what the raion should do in case the stories about the Counter-Revolution were confirmed.

The reciprocal respect and trust between the anarchist-communists and the toiling population of the raion became stronger and broader.

In my capacity as chairperson of the Gulyai-Pole Soviet I was empowered to do whatever was necessary to clarify the difficult situation of the revolution. So I sent two members of the Soviet to Odessa and Kiev (places where the troops of the Central Rada and the Left Bloc were clashing). When they returned and reported on what was happening, we immediately convened a Congress of Soviets.

At this Congress of the Soviets of Gulyai-Pole rayon we examined all the facts about the activities of the Central Rada and the Left Bloc. It was clear that the Central Rada, although lead by socialist-revolutionaries and social democrats, had as its goal not only driving the “katzaps” out of “Motherland Ukraine”, but also wiping out all every last trace of the Social Revolution.

The Congress passed the following resolution: Death to the Central Rada.

(This resolution of the Congress was rigorously put into practice.)

Several days after this, when the delegates had dispersed to their homes, the Soviet received a telegram from Aleksandrovsk announcing that units of the Central Rada had occupied the city in order to secure the Kichkass Bridge for the trains which were transporting Cossack troops from the external front to join General Kaledin on the Don.

When this telegram was received and understood the whole population of the raion, including the young and old, were on their feet.

I immediately received telephone messages and letters from all the villages of Gulyai-Pole raion. Most of these messages were brief, but clearly revolutionary. They expressed the readiness of the population to empower me to handle this crisis with the assistance of the best members of the Anarchist Communist Group who had done such a good job organizing the peasants.

The sincere and absolute confidence which the peasantry demonstrated towards me I found worrisome. (I say peasantry, not mentioning the workers because in Gulyai-Pole raion the chief role in the Revolution was played by the peasants; the workers at that time mostly took a wait-and-see position vis-à-vis the Revolution.) I had been working like crazy, never taking any rests, but never felt tired. But the trust of the peasants worried me — I feared setting out on the path of war.

Only a clear awareness that revolutionary work must be devoid of any sentimentality (which had infected my comrades) sustained me and I thrust any anxiety from my thoughts.

I posed the following question to myself and to my comrades of the Anarchist Communist Group: if I am an adherent of revolutionary anarchism, would it not be a great crime to limit myself in this time of great popular events to a secondary role? Would this not require me to trail after other groups and parties which would probably be hostile to our own views? An anarchist revolutionary must be in the vanguard of the fighting masses in order to win them over to the real struggle of Labour with Capital, not sparing oneself in the process.

I recall what I said at the meeting of our Group:

“It’s time to put an end to meetings. The times demand action. This remark really isn’t applicable to our group but we should keep it in mind.

Sixty to seventy percent of those comrades who call themselves anarchists are diverting themselves by seizing the gentry’s fancy homes in the cities and nothing gets done among the peasantry. Their way is the wrong way. They can’t influence the course of events sitting in those mansions. It’s sad, but that’s the way it is! Our group will have to work even harder among the peasants. Any day now the haidamaks of the Central Rada will descend on our region. These brutes bear, at the tips of their bayonets, the death of the Revolution and life of its enemies.

Our Group must form the vanguard of the struggle with these hirelings of the Counter-Revolution and lead against them the all toiling population of the rayon...

So, comrades, let’s get ready: some of you for local actions, others for the Congress which our Soviet has called for the day after tomorrow.

We must prove ourselves worthy of the trust the toilers of our raion have in us. And we can only do this by dedicating ourselves to their struggle for freedom and independence.”

The Group knew what it had to do at such a moment. Tirelessly, in the course of several months of revolution, it had moved itself and moved the peasantry in the same direction. And I would never have dared to speak about it if my opinion had not been requested on this question.

We prepared ourselves. A day later the delegates from the peasants arrived at the Congress.

At the Congress I decline the office of chairperson offered to me and took the floor with a report on behalf of the Gulyai-Pole Soviet and the Anarchist Communist Group. The Congress discussed my report thoroughly and resolved as follows: to put in order our weak forces, where they existed; and where they did not exist, to organize them immediately. And at the first summons from the Gulyai-Pole Soviet to muster in Gulyai-Pole or some other assembly point indicated by Gulyai-Pole.

This was at the end of December 1917.

# Chapter 20: With the Left Bloc against the Counter-Revolution

On December 31 1917 I was doing organizational work in the village of Pologi when I received an accurate report that a battle was going on in Aleksandrovsk between detachments of the Red Guard group of Bogdanov and some haidamak units of the Central Rada.

At such a moment it was impossible to remain on the sideline as a neutral observer. The population was clearly hostile towards the Central Rada, whose agents were combing the countryside, hunting down revolutionaries, and treating them as “traitors...of Mother Ukraine” and defenders of the “katzaps”, whom it considered necessary to exterminate as mortal enemies of the Ukrainian language.

Such concepts were offensive to the peasants. They dragged down from the tribune any speakers who espoused such notions and rained blows down on them as enemies of the fraternal unity of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples.

This rancorous propaganda of the Ukrainian nationalists pushed the toilers of Gulyai-Pole rayon on the road of armed struggle against any form of Ukrainian separatism because toilers saw in this chauvinism – which was in fact the ruling idea of Ukrainian nationalism – death for the Revolution.

While fighting was going on in Aleksandrovsk between the Red Guards and the haidamaks, several train-loads of Cossacks were grouped along the Aleksandrovsk – Apostolovo – Krivoi Rog line. These troops had removed themselves from the External Front and were on their way to the Don to General Kaledin. (Kaledin’s movement was in essence a genuine throwback to the old monarchist system. It went under the flag of independence for the Don, but suddenly at its very heart appeared the black forces of reaction whose intention was to use the Cossacks to finish off the Revolution and restore the rule of the Romanovs.)

On January 2, 1918, the Gulyai-Pole Soviet, with the participation of the Union of Metal & Carpentry Workers and the Anarchist Communist Group, met around the clock. There was a heated discussion about what urgent measures to take to prevent the Cossacks from reaching the Don, because, once they joined up with Kaledin, they would form a Front which would constitute a threat to all the conquests of the Revolution. We, the peasants, all agreed on this.

This long and tiring session inspired in all its participants one and same thought: we must, in spite of the obvious contradiction, form a united front with the government forces. We must arm ourselves and go to the aid of the Left Bloc. Our devotion to anti-authoritarian ideas would allow us to overcome any contradictions. After annihilating the black forces of reaction, we would extend and deepen the Revolution for the greatest good of all oppressed humanity. I said then:

“Each of us present today must keep our final goal in mind and make sure our actions are compatible with this goal: no person must be dominated by another person – an

idea which opens to us the road to peace, liberty, equality, and solidarity for the whole human family. At each step we must think about this and it will help us to remain true to all we have discussed and agreed to here."

In this way we resolved the problem of what our actions were to be in the immediate future.

# Chapter 21: Armed peasantry go to the aid of the city workers; the Aleksandrovsk Revkom and the Commission of Inquiry

On January 3, 1918, the Red Guard Commander Bogdanov addressed an appeal for help to the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Pole.

During the night of January 4, our group issued an appeal to the peasants and workers, inviting them to take up arms. On the same night I handed over my chairmanship in the Soviet to a comrade, and placed myself at the head of the anarchist detachment, composed of several hundred peasants. Fully armed, we set out for Aleksandrovsk.

I recall that just before leaving Gulyai-Pole our detachment, at my insistence, elected its own commander. I refused the position because I foresaw that in Aleksandrovsk my presence might be required away from the detachment arranging liaison between the city and the village. The detachment then elected as commander my brother, Savva Makhno.

A crowd of people gathered alongside the detachment. As we were leaving, the old men said to their sons who were in our ranks:

“You are going to your deaths. And we accept that. We will find the strength to take up your weapons and fight for your ideas, ideas which were unknown to us not so long ago but which we now accept. We will defend them to the death, if necessary. Don’t forget that, dear sons!”

And the sons replied:

“Thanks to you for having raised us. Now we are grown up and able to assert in life the ideas of freedom, equality, and solidarity. We would be happy to see our fathers fighting for these great ideals. But for the time being, follow our actions from a distance and, if we fail in the struggle against the enemies of the Revolution, you will defeat them here — and defeat them forever.”

Our farewells were touching.

Each of us knew where we were going and why. As soon as we were seated in the carts carrying us to the train station, we burst into revolutionary songs. Happy smiles lit up the faces of these young revolutionary peasants, the people whom Marx and followers regarded as beasts of burden fit only for obeying orders. Now here they were, conscious of themselves and aware of their duty to the Revolution, hurrying to help the urban workers. For decades the socialists of all stripes had considered urban workers as their own cadre through which they would seize power and begin to rule over others.

These peasants, knowing the danger they faced, did not hesitate to hasten to the city. They weren't the kind of revolutionaries who like to take part in parades and whose radicalism is purely verbal – no! They were true working class militants, devoted to the anarchist ideal. They might make mistakes, but their mistakes were honest ones and happened only because they were making an effort to put their anti-authoritarian ideals into practice.

There were between 800 and 900 of them – and more than 300 were members of the Anarchist Communist Group. They went to the city knowing that the urban workers were their brothers, were just as hostile as they to the domination of some by others, that they became upholders of authority only when, uprooted from their class, they fell under the sway of politicians.

As they left Gulyai-Pole, the peasants knew that the happiness and freedom of the toilers of town and country depended on the going forward of a truly social Revolution, and so they hastened to the aid of the city which was being besieged by the enemies of social revolution, in fact, of Revolution in general.

Our detachment arrived in Aleksandrovsk without incident. The city was quiet. The Red Guards were ensconced in their trains, only a few patrols roamed the streets.

By contrast the Aleksandrovsk authorities were engaged in feverish activity. The Revkom, composed of Bolsheviks and Left SRs, had at first tried to regulate the life of the workers. But they did not succeed: the Federation of Anarchists stood in the way, keeping the workers up to date about the doings of the newly-elected municipal authorities. Then the Revkom decided to confine itself to setting up a united front against the Counter-Revolution. With this in mind they proposed that the Aleksandrovsk Federation of Anarchists send two delegates to the Revkom.

The Federation appointed comrades M. Nikiforova and Yasha. M. Nikiforova was immediately elected deputy chair of the Revkom.

On the same day the Revkom asked our detachment to appoint our own representative. After consulting with the Aleksandrovsk anarchists who had always supported us, the detachment appointed me to represent the detachment at the Revkom. Joining the Revkom was a necessity of the moment. Refusing to take part in the Revkom would, we believed, have a negative effect on any future ideological struggle with the Left Bloc.

Upon our arrival in Aleksandrovsk, we protested against the continued detention of political prisoners: "Why have the prisons not been emptied?" Numerous peasants and workers had been incarcerated for refusing to recognize the regimes of Kerensky and the Central Rada. One of the Bolsheviks explained to us that they had not been freed because it was thought they would also rebel against the power of the Left Bloc.

After consulting with the workers who had tipped us off about these prisoners who were languishing in the crowbar hotel, we decided to send a representative immediately to the Revkom to demand their release. If the Revkom refused, we planned to force open the gates of the prison, free the prisoners, and burn down the prison.

Our detachment delegated me to go to the Revkom about this. The Revkom empowered me, the Left-SR Mirgorodsky, the SR Mikhailovsky, and some others to liberate the prison. We went there, had a look around, and listened to the grievances of the prisoners. Then we went to the prison office, exchanged opinions, and left. Our delegation was incomplete – the most important figure was missing. That was the Bolshevik Lepik who, behind the scenes, had just been appointed to be in charge of the Cheka; this was concealed from us at the time.

For me personally, having been incarcerated twice in that prison and knowing how dirty and uncomfortable it was, it was painful to leave without freeing anybody. But I limited myself only

to expressing some criticisms of Lepik and, together with Comrade Mirgorodsky, got in a cab and returned to the Revkom.

After supper we all got together and decided to forge ahead. The prison was emptied.

Still acting as agents empowered by the Revkom, I and the Left-SR Mirgorodsky were then delegated to the Front-line Military-Revolutionary Commission at the Red Guard unit of Bogdanov. This was the first armed group from the north which had entered Ukraine under the pretext of "helping the Ukrainian workers and peasants in their struggle against the counter-revolutionary Central Rada."

I was elected Chair of the Commission by the Red Guards from Petrograd (Vyborg district), and Comrade Mirgorodsky was elected Secretary. The Commission had seven members. We were brought a stack of files from the Commander's office, dossiers on the prisoners incarcerated in the railway wagons of the Stolypin-type which were coupled to the troop train.

We were asked to examine the dossiers and give our conclusions. But Comrade Mirgorodsky and I protested against such a procedure. We insisted that we could in all conscience examine the paper work only in the presence of the accused against whom this paper work had been put together. Then we could ask the accused to explain to us who he was, under what circumstances he was arrested, where, etc. (Our fellow members on the Commission, Petrograders, agreed with our reasoning but, as subordinates of the Commander, were unable to protest with us.)

The Commander was indignant at our behaviour but felt unable to ask the Aleksandrovsk Revkom to replace us with different people for moral, political, and strategic considerations. Indeed the Revkom was unlikely to agree and a whole storm would be raised against him, a storm which he and his Red Guards might not survive.

Consequently we were granted unlimited powers to summon each prisoner, ask them questions, read out the written evidence against them, and listen to their explanations and refutations of all these documents.

This Commission, which one could call a Military-Revolutionary Frontline Tribunal (and so it was considered by Bogadanov), kept me busy for three days. I worked feverishly, without taking time to eat or sleep.

There were a lot of prisoners. They were locked up in old tsarist, Stolypin-type wagons. Here were generals, colonels, and other ranks of officers. There were chiefs of police, public prosecutors, and simple soldiers from haidamak units. There was this in common about them: all, or almost all, were sworn enemies not just of the October Revolution but of Revolution in general. Thus they knew what they were doing when they acted against it.

Nevertheless the majority of them were not guilty of the crime of which they were accused. Most of them were arrested in their own apartments, without weapons, even, one can say confidently, without a thought of taking up arms and fighting against the Revolution. They were arrested because of the denunciations of evil people. I mean people who, in order to conceal their own dirty past record vis-à-vis the revolutionaries, had become even more odious by reversing themselves and hypocritically supporting the Revolution. These people denounced those who, due to their own social situation, were formerly outside the revolutionary movement but yet did not hinder its development. These vile people fabricated accusations in order to save themselves and contrived to find enemies of the Revolution in all ranks of the population.

But to the commanders of Red Guard detachments these informers were welcome since their denunciations of "enemies of the Revolution" assisted in cleansing the rear areas of enemies.

In this way were combined, in the course of the Revolution, the meanness of some with the self-sacrifice of others, and this because those with full powers in the struggle against the enemies of the Revolution were unable to discern the duplicity of their self-appointed accomplices.

Under my chairmanship, the Commission examined over 200 dossiers and gave its opinion on each of them. There were many cases in which the persons involved were recognized by the Commission as being active enemies of the Revolution. The Commission remanded their files to the headquarters of Commander Bogadanov who forwarded them to the headquarters of Antonov-Ovseyenko. (This meant, in the Bolshevik-Left SR jargon of the day, that the accused would be shot.)

Among the detainees interrogated by the Commission, almost all of those who were acknowledged as guilty showed themselves to be weak and cowardly. Facing imminent death, they had recourse to the most shameful means to try to save their skin. We saw generals weeping. On the other hand there were colonels who regretted falling into the hands of the revolutionaries because they were convinced they could have organized a sizeable force of volunteers to help General Kaledin restore the Romanov dynasty. And as they were led out of the salon carriage where the Commission was sitting, they cried out: "Long Live the House of Romanov! Long Live Tsar Nicholas Alexandrovich, Master of All Russia! May He Crush the Revolution!"

Mind you there were only two such colonels who remained true to their aristocratic-monarchist principles.

Among the many accused released after the review of their case by the Commission, I especially remember the commander of the Aleksandrovsk Military District. He was arrested for having followed orders from higher up to mobilize young recruits during the short-lived triumph of the Ukrainian Central Rada. There was no other evidence proving him to be an enemy of the Revolution. However, the Commission was divided on the question of releasing him. Four members of the Commission saw him as a convinced, active counter-revolutionary and insisted that the Commission accept their opinion and record the result in writing. Three members were against. It was clear that the district commander would be shot. A storm broke out among us. Comrade Mirgorodsky suggested to me that we quit the Commission and go back to the Revkom: perhaps the Revkom would delegate someone else in our place. The Petrograders started laughing at us, saying we were not conducting ourselves as revolutionaries. So Comrade Mirgorodsky and I explained to them how to act like revolutionaries. And then three of them changed their opinion that the district commander was so guilty against the Revolution that he must die. And the commander was freed.

While we were studying the dossiers, the Red Guards led in some newly arrested persons: Mikhno (the government commissar from the Kerensky period — the very same Mikhno who had threatened me with legal action four or five months previously for disarming the bourgeoisie in Gulyai-Pole raion), the uyezd chief of police Vasilyev, the public prosecutor Maksimov, and Peter Sharovsky. The latter had been a member of the Gulyai-Pole A-K Group and on May 1, 1910, betrayed our comrades Aleksandr Semenyuta and Marfa Piven, receiving for this vile deed 500 rubles of the 2,000 promised by the State for giving up A. Semenyuta. It was very painful for me to meet this old "comrade". On seeing me, he fell to his knees, raised his hands, and uttered: "Nestor Ivanovich, save me. My betrayal was unintentional. I talked too much to an undercover cop", etc.

Maybe I would have believed him, if not for information received from close friends while I was serving time at forced labour in Moscow. Furthermore, after my return to Gulyai-Pole, this

information was confirmed by Marfa Piven who was present when A. Semenyuta was killed. She had been struck by a bullet in the forehead but fortunately survived. Sharovsky's own brothers, Prokofii and Grigorii, had helped me in 1917 establish his role as a provocateur. One of them had even helped our comrade "Yaponetz" try to assassinate Peter Sharovsky soon after Semenyuta's death. Peter took two bullets but unfortunately was not killed. He himself showed that he was guilty. After recovering from his wounds, he bricked up all the lower windows in his house; and upon my return from prison he disappeared completely.

Then in Aleksandrovsk I spotted him going around from one group of workers to another with a tin cup in his hand. When I tried to grab him, he escaped.

I made use of my influence with the Red Guard commander Bogdanov to insist that the revolutionary authorities in Aleksandrovsk make the capture of Peter Sharovsky a priority. Bogdanov, without hesitation, dispatched two group of Red Guards to the square where I had seen Sharovsky, and they arrested him.

On January 6, 1918, I made a detailed report to the Commission (of which I was the chair) about who Peter Sharovsky was, and who A. Semenyuta was, and how Semenyuta had been betrayed by Sharovsky and how much reward Sharovsky received for his betrayal. In presenting my report I advised my listeners that I was not speaking to them as members of the Commission, but as Socialist-Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks who were to witness that Peter Sharovsky would not be killed unjustly. The Petrograd Bolsheviks on the Commission proposed handing over Sharovsky to Commander Bogdanov, but Mirgorodsky and I didn't agree with this and requested only that the Commander put Sharovsky in a holding cell until I was freed from pressing business. Then comrades from our Gulyai-Pole group arrived: Filipp Krat, Savva Makhno, Pavel Korostelyev, as well as some members of the Aleksandrovsk anarchist group. We repeatedly interrogated Sharovsky and then one of the comrades put a bullet in his head.

Another painful encounter was with the former commissar Mikhno. I had a gut feeling that it would be hard to establish his guilt before the revolutionary peasants and workers. He had ordered my indictment during his stint as Commissar of the Provisional Government for revolutionary actions carried out by the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution in Gulyai-Pole raion. He demanded the Gulyai-Pole Public Committee exclude me from any organizing activities. But when I wrote him a letter of protest in the name of the Gulyai-Pole raion Peasants' Congress and insisted that he withdraw his demand, he did indeed withdraw it. I felt that in determining his guilt I would be prejudiced and that this would lead to his doom; and yet, he compared favourably with many of the zemstvo leaders of Aleksandrovsk uyezd — he was known as an honest man and a liberal still in tsarist times. Moreover I was persuaded that he shouldn't be destroyed just for carrying out his obligations as a government commissar of the Provisional Government, even if he was from a hostile camp. Our raion never followed his orders, always rejecting them, and he was powerless to impose them on us so long as the toilers had the upper hand.

Our Commission questioned him closely about all his actions, reminded him of his campaign against me and the "Committee for the Defence of the Revolution" in Gulyai-Pole, and then released him.

Quite different were the cases of the prosecutor Maksimov and the uyezd chief of police Vasilyev. Both these characters, one a representative of the tsarist justice system, the other of the Provisional Government's police institutions, were regarded by the Commission, on the basis of a range of documents, as active enemies of the worker-peasant revolution. Both of them were, by the decision of the Commission, remanded to Bogdanov's headquarters. The Commission in-

formed the Aleksandrovsk Revkom about this decision. The Revkom was headed at that time by the Bolshevik Mikhailevich, the anarchist Maria Nikiforova, and several other revolutionaries well-known and influential in proletarian circles in the city. Hastily organized, the Revkom's hold on power was shaky which was why they tried to suck up to such members of the bourgeoisie who had not fled the city and who were lobbying behind the scenes to save Maksimov and Vasilyev. The chair of the Revkom, Comrade Mikhailevich, along with most of the other members of the Committee, hurried to the Commission, still sitting in Bogdanov's staff railway wagon at the southside railway station. They protested our decision in the matter of the prosecutor and the chief of police. Maria Nikiforova also showed up to support them along with several Bolsheviks from the Revkom and a delegation of Right SRs.

Our Commission was furious. According to documents presented to us by Bogdanov's headquarters, documents which had been gathered by intransigent Bolsheviks, Maksimov, in tsarist times and continuing under the coalition of the SRs and SDs with the bourgeoisie, had always been an implacable enemy of the toilers and their aspirations for liberty. His guilt before the revolutionary workers and peasants was manifest. He had organized among the bourgeoisie in Aleksandrovsk a committee of action against the Revolution. But he was able and energetic and the Bolsheviks, as became clear later, wanted to recruit him and indeed eventually they did.

When the Red Guards were attacking Aleksandrovsk, Vasilyev mounted a machine gun on the roof of one of the buildings and helped the haidamaks repulse the attack. He killed or wounded many of the Red Guards. Moreover, when he was chief of police of the city and its district, people arrested were always beaten. According to documents collected by the Bolsheviks, he was aware of and approved of these beatings.

Based on all this, the Commission declared Maksimov and Vasilyev enemies of the Revolution and the people. Accordingly they were remanded to the Bogdanov's headquarters where the commander could either have them shot or release them because the decisions of the Commission were not binding on him. Nevertheless, he generally followed our decisions, immediately releasing those we had found innocent and shooting the guilty ones.

After taking notice of the protest of the Revkom and receiving the delegation of the SRs, the Commission asked Bogdanov's headquarters to cancel our verdict and consider the cases of Maksimov and Vasilyev still before the Commission as we had received new information about them.

I, along with Comrade Mirgorodsky, tracked down Bogdanov and secured his promise that the lives of Maksimov and Vasilyev would be guaranteed until the conflict between the Commission and the Revkom on this matter was resolved.

I informed the SR delegation about this, and we began to wrangle with the members of the Revkom. Mikhailevich and Maria Nikiforova invited Commander Bogdanov to take part in our discussion. Bogdanov came and made it clear that he supported the decision of the Commission. The discussion was heated. The Commission sent a written copy of a resolution to Bogdanov's staff requesting that the prosecutor and the police chief be held in a special wagon under strict guard until notified by the Commission.

The discussion lasted six of seven hours. The result was the members of the Revkom acknowledged the justice of the Commission's decision in the cases of Maksimov and Vasilyev. But, according to the Revkom, the Commission had not taken into account what was happening at the moment. Either today or tomorrow it might be necessary to abandon Aleksandrovsk as Don and

Kuban Cossacks were approaching the city in numerous echelons after abandoning the external front, heading for the Don to join the troops of General Kaledin.

Around Kaledin were grouped all the dark forces of the counter-revolution and their hangers-on — small rural proprietors, merchants, mill-owners. This bunch had all crawled together to build a counter-revolutionary Front for the monarchy and for their own privileges over the toilers. And they were going to do it on the backs of the Cossacks, who stood to have their families wiped out and their farms devastated.

The Revkom members insisted vigorously that if Bogdanov had Maksimov and Vasilyev shot, this would discredit the authority of the Revkom in the city. And if the city had to be abandoned, it would be that much more difficult to occupy a second time.

I had taken on the thankless role of member of the Commission for two reasons: (1) to see for myself and be able to explain to the revolutionary peasants, how the state socialists occupied themselves in these great days of the revolution, how these “fighters for freedom and equality” sacrificed these great ideals for the privileges of their own power; and (2) in order to gain some important experience in a time of great events.

I considered myself a militant revolutionary who had come to the city with other peasant-revolutionaries with one goal: to help the workers defeat the hired warriors of the bourgeoisie — the haidamaks, and to disarm the Cossacks who had abandoned the External Front to help General Kaledin set up an Internal Front — against the toilers.

For me personally the argumentation of the members of the Revkom — the Bolsheviks, Right SRs, and the anarchist M. Nikiforova — seemed criminal. I told them so. Supporting my view were the Left SR Mirgorodsky, the three Red Guard Bolsheviks from Petrograd who were members of our Commission, and Commander Bogdanov himself.

Dawn was already breaking. Everyone was exhausted. The members of the Revkom were clearly mad at me but decided not to remove me from the Commission. The jesuitical politics which already at that time saturated the Bolsheviks and their hangers-on, the Left SRs, would not allow them to do so. They agreed to continue holding the prosecutor and the police chief under detention so that, on the one hand, they could save their lives, and, on the other hand, they could embarrass me in front of the numerous peasant-revolutionaries from Gulyai-Pole raion. Therefore they proposed a compromise resolution which read: “to transfer the prosecutor Maksimov and the police chief Vasilyev to the Revkom, which will collect further information about them and make a thorough examination of their cases.” This deplorable resolution only enraged the Commission and we decided that, rather than submit the cases to the Revkom, they should be subject to a new review in which the Commission would take part. This decision, after some protests from the Revkom, was finally adopted.

At this time arrived news that almost 20 echelons of Cossacks were headed to Aleksandrovsk from Apostolovo by way of Nikopol, hoping to pass through on their way to the Don and Kaledin. After quarrelling all night, this news suddenly brought us together and we hurriedly transferred the two prisoners from their railway wagon to the Aleksandrovsk prison, Cell No.8. (In tsarist times I spent more than a year in this cell. The prosecutor often visited the prison and I complained to him that the cell was dirty, had lots of bugs, and little air. His reply was: “You want more air?” and with a malicious grin ordered me sent to solitary confinement for 14 days.)

The regimen in Cell No.8 when I was there was like this: one visit per month from family, change of linen and bath twice a month, no looking out the window into the courtyard, etc.

Our meeting broke up and each of us returned to our posts. We proceeded to prepare our forces for action. We led them across the Kichkass Bridge to the right bank of the Dnepr in order to set up a battle line.

## Chapter 22: Battle with Cossacks, negotiations, and an agreement

It was January 8 1918 and it was cold. Towards evening a fine snow began to fall presaging a slight thaw. Our combat units occupied their positions and dug trenches. We communicated by telephone with the Cossack commanders and arranged to name delegates who would meet half-way between the stations of Kichkass and Khortiz to establish clearly what each side wanted from the other.

Our delegation was composed of two commanders from Bogdanov's group, from the detachment of sailors — Comrade Boborikin, from the detachment of Aleksandrovsk anarchists — Maria Nikiforova, and from the revolutionary peasantry of Gulyai-Pole rayon and the Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group — myself.

Around 6 p.m. we travelled by locomotive to the appointed place. To meet us approached a locomotive with one wagon carrying the delegates of the Cossack units. This delegation was composed of both officers and rank-and-file Cossacks. But the rank-and-filers didn't say anything. The officers did the talking. They spoke arrogantly, sometimes even with swearing. In particular, there was a lot of swearing when Comrade Boborikin declared that we would not allow them to pass through Aleksandrovsk with their weapons.

We spent a good hour jawing at each other and who knows how long we might have continued if the Cossacks had not declared outright that they didn't need any permission from us to cross the Kichkass Bridge and pass through Aleksandrovsk.

"We are," one of their delegates told us, "18 echelons of Cossacks from the Don and Kuban-Labinsk regions, and six or seven echelons of haidamaks of the Central Rada." [The haidamaks supposedly came from Odessa and hooked up with the Cossacks in transit with the goal of penetrating to the left bank of the Dnepr to engage in a struggle there against the "katzaps".]

Hearing this bold declaration, which was accompanied by filthy language, our delegate replied: "In that case, we'll take off. Our negotiations are finished. We, the representatives of the peasants, workers, and sailors, see in your attitude the desire to provoke a bloody, fratricidal struggle. Bring it on! We'll be waiting!"

We immediately left their wagon and our locomotive carried us back to our lines. The Cossack delegation returned to their side.

Returning to our positions, we told our fighters that our parley with the Cossacks had led to nothing, that we could expect an attack at any minute, and that we must intensify the reconnaissance efforts of each unit and of the line of defence as a whole.

Then we sent a party down the track about one kilometre in the direction of the Cossacks and detached the rails in two places. When everyone had returned, it was about 1 a.m. and we anxiously awaited the attack of the Cossacks.

The night was overcast. The light snow which had been falling all evening was changing to rain.

Now it was already 2 a.m. The rain was coming down harder. The enemy had not showed himself and probably had decided to wait for dawn. Many fighters, sprawled in the trenches which they had just dug, talked among themselves. But the old soldiers from Gulyai-Pole said to them: "Don't be fooled, Comrades, the Cossacks will try to take advantage of this bad weather by out-flanking us and seizing the Kichkass Bridge and Aleksandrovsk."

Many laughed. But their laughter soon stopped because shortly after 2 a.m. our scouts reported they heard blows striking the rails. That was an advanced reconnaissance of the Cossacks which had reached the dislocated rails. They were checking the railway line to find out what state it was in.

Ten or 15 minutes later we heard a locomotive huffing and puffing.

"They're coming," was whispered all through our units.

"Keep quiet!" other voices whispered.

Our nerves were on edge. We were shivering.

"War — is a nasty business," said our fighters to each other.

I crouched down next to two of them and continued their thought:

"Yes, my friends, war is very nasty, we all know that but we still have to take our part in it.

"But why, why? Tell us Nestor Ivanovich," they insisted.

"So long as the enemies of our liberty have recourse to arms in order to fight us," I continued, "we are obliged to answer them in kind. Now we see that our enemies have not renounced arms. But at the same time they know well that the toilers no longer want to be paid servants but demand to be free, secure from any kind of forced labour. It would seem that this is enough.

Our enemies, the pomeshchiks, owners of factories and plants, generals, bureaucrats, merchants, priests, jailers, and the whole pack of cops hired to protect the pillars of the tsarist-pomeshchik regime — need to understand this and not try to block the path of the toilers who are trying to complete their work of revolutionary liberation.

Not only do they not want to understand, these parasites try to win over a certain number of state-socialists and, working with these class traitors, they invent new forms of authority to prevent the toilers from winning their rights to a free and independent life.

All these idlers do nothing, they don't produce their own needs but try to have everything they want without working. They want to run everything, including the lives of the toilers and always — this is their characteristic — at the expense of the toilers.

Consequently they are responsible for this war, not us. We are only defending ourselves but that, my friends, is not enough. We can't limit ourselves to defence, we also must go over to the attack. Defence is fine if, having overthrown Capital and the State, we were living in abundance and liberty, if wage slavery had been replaced by equality, and if our enemies were arrayed against us with the goal of crushing us and reducing us to slavery again. But in a situation where we are still reaching towards our goal, we must plan to attack our enemies ourselves.

Defence is closely linked with offence, but it also involves our brothers and sisters who are not fighting in the front lines but are carrying on with broadening and

intensifying the ideals of the Revolution, which you, my friends, wrongly call war. In this sense the work of defence acquires its true character and justifies all the blood spilled by the combatants in the destructive phase of the Revolution; for this work consolidates the achievements of the Revolution without deforming their character or significance."

At this moment was heard a shout: "Machine gun section — fire!"

This command was addressed to a detachment with 16 to 18 machine guns which had followed our reconnaissance troops and set up their guns at a bend in the railway where they would face the approaching echelons of the enemy. (I did not approve of such a wasteful use of machine guns but at that time the Red Guards had three times as many machine guns as they needed so they weren't considered valuable which is why these guns were moved so far in advance of our line of front.)

When the machine gun unit opened fire, I suddenly realized that I had been speaking to nearly 100 fighters, intently listening to what I said. Now they ran off to their posts. In answer to our machine guns, the enemy returned strong fire. Now began to crackle machine gun and rifle fire along the whole front which illuminated the whole line. The enemy's firing ceased. We also stopped.

I felt a great sadness at this moment, a sadness which was shared by my companions. They recalled the cruelty with which, in 1905–06, the Cossacks had suppressed the attempts of the working people who had dared to voice their demands freely in their own assemblies. Each of us, if we had not seen it ourselves, had heard about it. This memory gave more courage to our combatants, it incited them to despise death, to face even more resolutely these men, like all men capable of both good and evil, but who at the moment were marching, bursting with pride, under the banner of antiquated ideas and led by generals and other officers. These men, mistaken it's true, were forcing their way, weapons in hand, through revolutionary territory. They were headed to the "White" Don, to General Kaledin, to support reaction and make it triumph over the Revolution which had already cost the toilers so dearly. These men were our enemies, ready to strike us with their Cossack whips, with their rifle butts, to kill us outright.

Among our combatants sounded the cry: "Let's attack! We must not let them leave the wagons!"

But soon the Cossacks advanced again towards our lines and opened fire. The reply of our guns was so strong and accurate that the lead echelon moved backwards quickly, responding with only a few isolated shots.

The Cossack command had prepared a series of echelons which it dispatched from Khortiz station in support of the first train. But the first train, moving backwards rapidly, collided with one of the support trains, knocking both trains off the rails. The collision was so violent that many wagons were destroyed and people and horses were killed. The Cossack command was forced to withdraw all the echelons remaining at Khortiz station back towards Nikopol'. At the same time they appointed a delegation of about 40 men, mostly Cossacks, to treat with us.

This delegation arrived under a white flag at around 3 p.m. on January 8, 1918. We met the delegation of Cossacks with great pleasure, led it to our command post, and with special interest asked what propositions it had after the failure to break through revolutionary territory by force. The delegation told us that behind the Cossack echelons were several echelons of haidamaks. These haidamaks dreamed of occupying Aleksandrovsk with the help of the Don and Kuban

Cossacks. Then the haidamaks intended to scour the villages, killing “katzaps”, “yids”, and anyone else who didn’t profess the “orthodox faith” so they could raise the blue & yellow banner of pogroms over the land of “Mother Ukraine”.

“But after the failure of our attack yesterday,” the delegation told us, “after the destruction of trains and an evaluation of the strength of your forces and the support you enjoy among the population, the haidamaks withdrew in the direction Nikopol’ — Apostolovo. Our Cossack command has decided not to follow them but to enter into negotiations with you to arrange a free passage through your territories.”

“We will agree to give up our arms,” said the Cossacks, “but leave us our horses and saddles and, if possible, our sabres.”

Our command did not agree with this, for it well understood that a saddled horse and a sabre constitute the essential equipment for a Cossack, not only on the march but for a sudden attack on the enemy, especially if the enemy was like most of the revolutionary forces of that time — an untrained mob, only the raw material of a real army.

The delegation of Cossacks finally renounced their sabres, but insisted firmly on their horses and saddles. They argued that their tradition did not allow them to appear either at home or for military service without a horse and saddle. And our command, due to a whole range of considerations, tactical and otherwise, was compelled to concede on this point.

After the agreement, one part of the delegation returned to their echelon, the other part stayed with us.

The haidamak troops which had retreated to the Nikopol’ — Apostolovo line, learning that the Don and Kuban Cossacks had agreed to give up their weapons before the revolutionary front, retreated even further to the Verkhovtzevo — Verkhne — Dneprovsk region.

Over the next two and a half days the Cossack troops, 18 echelons strong, were disarmed and escorted into Aleksandrovsk. Here they were able to re-stock their provisions and a whole series of meetings were organized for their benefit on the subject of the worker-peasant revolution.

During these meetings the Left Bloc tried to win over the Cossacks to its ideas and trotted out the best orators they had available. These characters were very militant verbally, they described themselves as “implacably devoted to the Revolution and its goals: the liberation of work, the abolition of the capitalist yoke and the police state”. These buffoons promised the Cossacks complete freedom, yakked about autonomy for the Don and other regions which had been oppressed under the rule of the Romanovs and which had formed the “one and indivisible” Russia, the “Holy” Russia run for the benefit of thieves and swindlers.

Some of the orators ranted shamelessly about the national renaissance of each of the oppressed regions, in spite of the presence at these meetings of their political opponents who knew perfectly well that all these beautiful words were contradicted by the real actions of the current government leaders and that, in pronouncing these speeches before a mass of Cossacks, they flagrantly lied.

However, the Cossacks paid little attention to what was said to them. They stood around and, occasionally, laughed.

Then the anarchists spoke, and in particular M. Nikiforova, who told the Cossacks that the anarchists were not promising anything to anyone, they only hoped that people would learn to know themselves, to understand their own social situation, and to want to gain their own liberty.

“But before speaking to you about all that in detail, Cossacks, I must tell you that up to now you have been the executioners of the toilers of Russia. Will you remain so in the future, or will

you recognize your own wicked role and join the ranks of the toilers? Up to now you have shown no respect for the toilers whom, for one of the tsar's roubles or a glass of wine, you have nailed living to the cross."

At this point the several-thousand strong crowd of Cossacks removed their papakhas and bowed their heads.

M. Nikiforova continued her speech. Many Cossacks were weeping like children.

Near the anarchist's tribune stood a group of Aleksandrovsk intellectuals who said to one another: "My God! How pitiful and pale seem the speeches of the representatives of the Left Bloc and the parties in comparison with the speeches of the anarchists and, in particular, with the speech of M. Nikiforova."

For us, hearing this from the mouths of people who always disdained us throughout all the days and years of the Revolution, it was very flattering.

But we didn't speak the truth to the Cossacks just to impress certain people. We only wanted the Cossacks to understand how things really stood, and, so understanding, be able to free themselves from being the tools of the ruling class. Ever since they settled ages ago on the Don and Donets, along the Kuban and the Terek, they had been the butchers of any attempt by labour to free itself. Yes, the Cossacks throughout their history had been the executioners for the toilers of Russia. Many of them had already realized this, but many still went to meet the revolutionary toilers with sabre and whip in hand.

All during their stay in Aleksandrovsk (which lasted five days after this meeting), the Cossacks came en masse to visit the office of the Federation of Anarchists. They wanted to ask questions about anarchism and willingly answered questions put by the anarchists. Relations were established. Some of the Cossacks left an address so they could receive anarchist publications and exchange correspondence on questions concerning the Social Revolution.

The Cossacks of Kuban, those of the Labinsky area especially, were the most eager to keep in contact with us and I know several of them maintained an active correspondence with our anarchists. They asked for information about various questions of social organization and always requested any fresh literature. They sent whatever money they could.

The Don Cossacks were also very interested but not on such a scale. This can be explained on the one hand by the fact that they were less advanced socially and on the other hand because their territory had been transformed into a hotbed of reaction which aimed at destroying the Revolution. This reaction was headed by Generals Kaledin, Alekseev, and Kornilov along with sundry tsarist functionaries and learned professors.

While the disarmed Cossacks were in Aleksandrovsk, the revolutionary commander proposed that they come to the defence of the Revolution by opposing General Kaledin. Many of them accepted this invitation and declared themselves ready to take up arms and leave for the revolutionary front. They were formed into sotnias and dispatched to Khar'kov to put themselves at the disposal of General Antonov-Ovseenko, commander of the armies of the south of Russia.

On the other hand, many declared that they wanted to see their children and parents since they had been away from home for four years. The revolutionary commander authorized them to leave but, in reality, they were also sent through Khar'kov where they were relieved of their horses.

I'm not going to censure this act of the revolutionary powers of the Left Bloc, for the moment was such that allowing the horses, with saddles, to pass through the war zone meant, in effect, treason to the Revolution. But what irked me and others at the time was the fact that the

Bolsheviks and Left SRs, in their negotiations with the Cossacks, acted not as revolutionaries but as Jesuits, promising them one thing and doing another. In doing so they created much evil. However, they always behaved like this. They sent an armoured car to break up a meeting of anarchists in Khar'kov and spied on revolutionary organizations everywhere. This only presaged worse things to come for these two parties, now ruling the country, were revolutionary in name only.

## Chapter 23: My observations on the Left Bloc in Aleksandrovsk

The Front established against the advance of the Cossacks coming from the External Front towards Zaporozh'e was dismantled. No more Cossacks were expected from that direction. All revolutionary units were withdrawn from the right bank of the Dnepr to the left — to the city of Aleksandrovsk and nearby villages.

The goal of Bogdanov's staff was to advance in the direction of Crimea. The city of Aleksandrovsk was left without defence and the inhabitants were obliged to organize themselves for this purpose. The workers began to do this.

The Revkom, with the support of its constituent parties, also began to display its "revolutionary" activity. Its activity consisted of arbitrary interference in the life the local peasantry and, of course, it adopted an imperious, even threatening tone, in its written and verbal orders.

The Revkom also acted boldly in city matters: it imposed on the bourgeoisie of Aleksandrovsk a levy of 18,000,000 roubles.

Against, just as under the Provisional Government and the Central Rada, arrests started taking place. First on the list were the right-wing socialists (the anarchists, because of their influence in Gulyai-Pole and Kamishevansky raions, could not be touched). At the Revkom one often heard talk of a "Commissar of the Prison", for that was almost the most important post in this "socialist" regime.

I often felt like blowing up the prison, but never succeeded in acquiring a sufficient quantity of dynamite or pyroxylin for this purpose. I spoke about this a number of times to the Left SR Mirgorodsky and M. Nikiforova, but I only frightened them and they proceeded to heap all kinds of work on me which prevented me from approaching the Red Guards, who had all kinds of explosive stuff.

In Aleksandrovsk, I plunged into any kind of work the Revkom gave me to do and carried it through to the end.

But to work like a horse and not know what was going on behind my back was not in my character — all the more so in that I was not a novice at revolutionary work. I wasn't working just to impress whoever happened to be "all-knowing" or "all-powerful" at the current moment.

I saw clearly that collaboration with the Left Bloc was impossible for an anarchist revolutionary — even in the struggle to defend the Revolution. The revolutionary spirit of the Left Bloc parties began to change noticeably as they sought only to dominate the Revolution and to rule in the crudest sort of way.

Observing their work in Aleksandrovsk, and earlier at the uyezd and provincial congresses of peasants and workers, where at that time they were in a majority, I foresaw that the bloc of these two parties was a fiction. Sooner or later one of them would absorb the other for they both supported the principle of the State and its authority over the free community of toilers.

It's true that the toilers, the active element of the Revolution, could not notice this tendency of the political parties in time. They had such confidence in all the revolutionaries that they hardly concerned themselves with scrutinizing their ideas and actions. One constantly had to explain to them what was going on. And who could carry out this necessary function I often asked himself – the anarchists and only the anarchists!

And where at this time in the Russian Revolution did the anarchists have connections with the broad labouring masses? The majority of those claiming to be leaders of Russian anarchism were dragging along behind the centralizing powers of the Left Bloc or not involved in any kind of direct revolutionary action, i.e. at the margins of the Revolution. This was true of the top circles of both the anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists (about the anarcho-individualists I shall not speak, because they had no organizations in Russia or Ukraine).

Some independent working class and peasant anarchist groups, having belatedly arrived at some or other tactical decision, threw themselves into the revolutionary fray and were honourably consumed by it in fighting for their own ideals. But alas! They were used up in the storm of the revolution prematurely and without any, or very little, benefit for their own movement.

You might ask: how could things happen this way? Personally, I have only one response to give: "Not being organized, the anarchists lacked unity in action." The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, on the other hand, exploited the faith of the workers in the Revolution, methodically opposing their party interests to the interests of the workers.

Under other circumstances these parties would never have dared replace grass roots revolutionary activity with the shady scheming of their Central Committees. It was all too clear that there was no one to unmask their perfidy. The right-wing socialists allowed themselves to be led by the bourgeoisie. That left only the anarchists to lead the revolutionary forces of the toilers against these machinations. But we, the anarchists, did not have at our disposal an organized force with a definite and positive grasp of the problems of the day.

The Bolsheviks and the Left SRs, under the leadership of the crafty Lenin, noted these deficiencies in our movement and rejoiced. Because we were organizationally powerless, we were unable to oppose the statist from dominating the Revolution which from beginning to end had been connected with anarchist ideas. The statist parties approached the masses with more assurance, deceiving them with the slogan "All Power to the Local Soviets", and created at their expense a party-state type of political power which subordinated all aspects of the Revolution to itself and especially the toilers who had only just succeeded in breaking their chains but were by no means entirely free of them.

By collaborating with the bourgeoisie when all working people were against this collaboration, the Right SRs and Mensheviks contributed to the success of the Left Bloc parties. At this point working people had not rejected the Right SRs, even if they had outstripped their programs. The Right Socialists, to avoid having to bear all the weight of their collaboration with the bourgeoisie, tried to drag working people along with them by referring to the "law" and the "legal power" of the Constituent Assembly, etc.

These ideas which the Right Socialists made so much of were already unacceptable to the toilers. The Right Socialists were objectively already acting against the Revolution. This resulted in the labouring masses giving their preference to the Bolsheviks and Left SRs as well as provoking absolute distrust and a hostile stance towards the Right Socialists.

This phenomenon, so tragic for the Revolution, was known to every revolutionary anarchist who worked with the workers and peasants and who shared with them the successes and errors of this turn in the Revolution.

It distressed me to see that the Left Bloc was not the revolutionary grouping necessary at the moment of the decisive conflict of labour with capital and governmental power. To reach this moment the revolutionaries had expended their strength, including their lives. But the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs were going to spoil the opportunity either by retreating before the reaction of the right socialists who were allied with the bourgeoisie or by massacring each other in a battle to see which would have the number one position in power. In any case the Left Bloc was not providing the help needed to the Revolution so that it could develop freely in its own creative way.

Convinced of this, I gathered several comrades from the Aleksandrovsk Federation of Anarchists (who brought with them sympathetic workers and soldiers) along with my comrades from the Gulyai-Pole brigade. I shared with them my fears on the subject of the Revolution which was, in my opinion, threatened with death on all sides and particularly from the side of the Left Bloc.

I said to my comrades that it would have been better for the Revolution if the Bolsheviks and Left SRs had not formed a bloc because both parties want supreme power over the Revolution and incapable of sharing that power. Ultimately this would lead to a falling out with internal struggles which would cause enormous damage to the Revolution.

“One sees already,” I said, “that it’s not the people who are enjoying liberty but the political parties. The day will soon come when the people will be completely crushed under the boot of these parties. The parties do not serve the people, rather the people serve the parties. Note that it often happens nowadays that in some question which concerns the people, they are mentioned by name but all the decisions are made directly by the political parties. The people are good only to listen to what the governments tell them!”

Then, after sharing my impressions and my profound conviction that it was time to prepare ourselves to struggle against the schemes of these parties, I shared my plans, not with the whole group but with an intimate circle of fellow-anarchists. I had been mulling over these plans since July-August 1917 and they had partially been put into effect in our organizing work among the peasantry. These plans can be summarized as follows: since the peasants aspire to be their own masters, we ought to approach their local autonomous organizations and explain to them each move made by the socialists to gain supreme power and tell them that the Revolution which they, the peasants, had made had quite another thing in mind. Namely the right of the toilers to liberty and free work and the destruction of any tendency to authoritarian power over the working classes.

If one wants to, one can always get close to the peasants. It’s only necessary to settle among them and work with them — work honestly and tirelessly. When, through lack of knowledge, the peasants try to create something that could be harmful for the development of a free society, one must explain to them, convince them that it would be a heavy burden rather than a boon. Instead propose something which would respond to their needs without contradicting the anarchist ideal.

“Our ideal is very rich and there are many points in which can be immediately put into practice by the peasants for their greatest good,” I said.

My other plans were of a conspiratorial character. I did not speak of them at the meeting of comrades that day, but I had progressively prepared the members of the Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group to carry out these plans. Thanks to our intensive work among the peasants, we had created links with the population which would soon allow us to pass to the realizations of these plans. We, militant revolutionary anarchists, were called to act by the circumstances in which a variety of causes were placing the Revolution in danger.

After consulting with the Aleksandrovsk comrades, I decided to sever my connections with the Revkom and return to Gulyai-Pole with the whole detachment.

On the same day I ran into Comrade Mirgorodsky (Left SR) and invited him to have supper with me at the dining room of the Federation. When he arrived, I didn't beat around the bush but told him that the next day I would tell the Revkom that my detachment was withdrawing me as a representative and would not be sending another in my place.

Comrade M. Nikiforova and some other comrades from the Federation begged me not to be in such a hurry. Mirgorodsky also tried to reason with me but I could not go back on a decision which had already been made with the agreement of my detachment. There remained only to formulate the decision officially in such a way that the Revkom would not interpret it erroneously.

At the Federation of Anarchists not everybody knew about this decision. When they found out, they asked me to explain the cause or the goal of my departure from the Revkom. At that time there were also some workers close to the Left SRs present. They also insisted that I say why I was leaving the Revkom and the city of Aleksandrovsk.

I had to repeat what I had already told numerous comrades. I said that, in my opinion, there were already signs of a rift in the Left Bloc and this at a time when it had hardly been formed. The cause of this, again in my opinion, was, on the one hand, the historico-philosophical divergence between Marxism and Socialist-Revolutionary theory; and, on the other hand, the vanity which pushed each party to get the upper hand over the other in the mad struggle for power over the Revolution.

"It appears quite obvious to me," I said, "that in the not-too-distant future these two parties currently running the country will have a falling out and actually try to exterminate each other, threatening with ruin the Revolution and all that is best in it.

Why in hell should I waste my energy here when I can see the beginnings of the real Revolution in the countryside? The peasants are becoming conscious in a revolutionary way, they are showing their will to struggle for their ideal of justice, we must help them!" I cried out furiously, to the astonishment of the comrades present.

I'm not saying you must all go to the peasants, comrades. I know you well — you are used to the city and are close to the workers. Work here, but remember that here the Revolution has passed from direct action to rules and regulations issued by the Revkom. In the villages, the Revkom will not have such an easy time of it. That's where the soul of the Revolution is, here is where the Counter-Revolution will be. Only an intensive organization of the revolutionary forces of the villages can prevent attempts to kill the Revolution."

To this my comrades from the anarchists and their friends, the Left S-R sympathizers, replied that the future will be revealed in due time. "But in the meantime the Left Bloc is still following

the road of the Worker-Peasant Revolution. It is firmly staying the course. A majority of the toiling masses see this and support the Bloc. Consequently, to agitate against it or raise an insurrection would simply pave the way for the return of the semi-bourgeois Kerensky regime or, still worse, consolidate the position of the Central Rada which has almost abdicated from the struggle for the liberation of the toilers. Such adventurism would be a crime against the Revolution."

"We deplore your attitude towards the Left Bloc," said my comrades, "and would be happy if you looked at things from a different point of view. As you yourself constantly stress, the revolutionaries must always be with the people in order to broaden, deepen and further develop the Revolution."

Up to the present you and we have done this. What is stopping us from continuing this work? We all know that if the Left Bloc turns to the right, or tries to bring a halt before the toilers have attained their goals — liberty, equality and independent work — we will immediately pursue a campaign against it. And then each toiler will see and understand that we are right to rebel against the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs."

I recall that Maria Nikiforova and all the friends who worked with her in this city defended this position. She cited several times the name of Comrade A. Karelina, saying that before her departure from Petrograd she had talked to him a lot about this question and he said that this was the best attitude that we could take towards the power of the Left Bloc.

However, these reasonable-sounding arguments of my comrades didn't shake me in the least. I was profoundly convinced that the Bloc was not long for this world. A sign of this, besides those mentioned above, I found in the fact that Lenin acted without any control not only by the Party of Left SRs, but also by his own party, of which he was the creator and leader.

Having organized the peasants of Gulyai-Pole and its raion where the Bolsheviks and SRs had no influence, I had an outsider's point of view on these things. I saw that Lenin intended to make of the Left SRs (among whom I saw none of the core members of the old SR Party) a toy in his hands. That's why I abstained from any response to the comrades and only said once more that I was nevertheless returning to Gulyai-Pole.

While we were exchanging opinions about the Left Bloc and the future of the Revolution which it was trying to control, I received from the commissar of posts a telephonogram from Gulyai-Pole. It announced that agents of the Central Rada had arrived in Gulyai-Pole who, while declaring themselves supporters of the soviets, were carrying on an energetic agitation to persuade soldiers returning from the External Front to organize haidamak units in Gulyai-Pole and its raion. The nationalists had already got started on this. The telephonogram was signed by M. Shramko.

This message helped me to quit the Aleksandrovsk Revkom and hastened my departure for Gulyai-Pole.

After drawing up an official document, recalling me from the Revkom in the name of the Gulyai-Pole detachment, I went to the Revkom to submit this document as required and to say goodbye. At the Revkom my recall was greeted unfavourably, the executive expressed its disapproval but in a restrained tone. When I explained the reason why I and the whole detachment were in such a hurry to get back to Gulyai-Pole, the chairman of the Revkom, Comrade

Mikhailevsky, pulled me aside into a private office and gushed that he was overjoyed that I was rushing back to my raion.

“Your presence in Gulyai-Pole, Comrade Makhno, is necessary now more than ever. And besides, as I think you know already, we are thinking of dividing Aleksandrovsk uyezd into two administrative units, on an initiative from higher up. It is proposed that one of these units be organized under your direction at Gulyai-Pole!”

I responded to my “benefactor” that this idea didn’t interest me, that it didn’t fit in with my views on the subsequent growth and development of the Revolution.

“Besides,” I added, “this all depends on your future successes, does it not?”

“But our successes are assured. All the workers and peasants are with us, and they already hold everything in their hands” exclaimed my ex-colleague.

“Have you not read the telephonogram I got from Gulyai-Pole? And do you not understand what was in it?” I said to him.

“But, yes!”

“We’d better leave our conversation for later,” I remarked. “Now you need to order the commandant of the Ekaterinoslav station to prepare an echelon for four o’clock to transport the Gulyai-Pole detachment.”

The order was given immediately.

I continued speaking with him and other members of the Revkom, including the anarchist M. Nikiforova. I talked about the clearly revolutionary mood in the raion and then, taking leave of everyone, I departed for the station. A few minutes later members of the Revkom arrived at the station, most of them in an automobile, M. Nikiforova on horseback. They came to say goodbye again and see us off.

Once more I exchanged a few words with the directors of the Revkom. Then the detachment sang the anarchist marching song and the train left the station.

## **Chapter 24: Suppression of the zemstvo territorial units; formation of a Revkom by members of the Soviet; search for funds**

During the time that I, along with our bunch of energetic revolutionary peasants, worker-anarchists, and sympathetic-to-anarchism non-party revolutionaries were absent from Gulyai-Pole, guests turned up in the village — agents of the Central Rada. These were landowners of Gulyai-Pole who had been appointed sub-lieutenants during the War and had now been sent into the countryside and villages to preach the idea of an independent Ukraine supporting itself on the backs of the “haidamaks” and the Cossacks.

We arrived in Gulyai-Pole at night and during that same night I was informed by soldiers just returned from the Front that they had held a meeting at which agents of the Central Rada announced that troops of the Rada were concentrating in Podolia and around Kiev. These agents invited the Frontoviks to organize themselves here and seize power over the raion where there was currently a power vacuum.

As an added incentive, a certain Vulfovich, a Frontovik who called himself a “Maximalist”, presented to the assembly several anonymous letters which affirmed that there existed in Gulyai-Pole and its raion some kind of benevolent society which could make regular subsidies to an organization of Frontoviks, etc., etc.

I immediately decided to arrest the “Maximalist” Vulfovich. At 1 a.m. I went to the secretary of the Anarchist Communist Group, Comrade Kalashnikov, and together we summoned a number of comrades. After talking things over, we arrested Vulfovich. He protested, declaring that he would protest to the Anarchist Communist Group. (He knew I made regular reports to the Group about my actions while occupying official positions. The Group decided collectively if my actions were consistent with the tasks the Group had set itself. The same procedure was followed for any members serving on Soviets or Public Committees as a result of being elected by the toilers.)

He was convinced that I would get in trouble for arresting him. But I told him that he had been arrested in order to clarify from whom he had received the anonymous letters about a society in Gulyai-Pole and its raion which had money available for funding the organization of troops for the Central Rada. Vulfovich stopped his swaggering; in fact, he entirely caved in and told us everything. He said he received the letters an hour before the meeting from Citizen Althausen, owner of a hotel in Gulyai-Pole and the uncle of Naum Althausen, a provocateur well known to our group.

Citizen Althausen was also arrested right away. I explained to him the reason for his arrest and said that, along with Vulfovich, he would be remanded by the Soviet to a tribunal of the General Assembly of Peasants and Workers of Gulyai-Pole.

Citizen Althausen realized that this matter was taking a serious turn. The General Assembly would demand to know the details of the existence in the raion of a secret funder of the Central Rada. He preferred to tell the truth right away.

“The Jewish community in Gulyai-Pole,” he said, “are afraid of the Ukrainian nationalists. That’s why they decided to take the initiative to seek them out and offer them financial support. Then in the event of their triumph they would know that the Jews supported an independent Ukraine and those who struggled for it.”

He added: “You realize, Citizen Makhno, there’s nothing going on here that could harm the Revolution. The only loss would be to our Society because it would be paying this money out of its own pocket.” And he pointed at his left pocket.

The comrade members of the Soviet of Peasants’ and Workers’ Deputies, hearing that Gulyai-Pole was in an uproar, hurried to join us. They were outraged by the conduct of the Jewish community and demanded the arrest and interrogation of all its leaders with the aim of finding out the truth about their odious behaviour in relation to the freedom of Gulyai-Pole.

Realizing the hatred that the knowledge of this act of the Jews would provoke among the non-Jewish population of Gulyai-Pole, I tried to keep the lid on things. I advised that we limit ourselves to interrogating Althausen and then make a detailed report to the General Assembly. We would ask that the whole Jewish community not be held responsible for the acts of a few.

The comrades from the Soviet agreed with me and trusted my judgement in this matter. Citizens Vulfovich and Althausen were immediately released.

Anyone who aspires to write an authentic history of Gulyai-Pole would need to have been present at that General Assembly of Peasants and Workers. The insurgency in Gulyai-Pole and its raion was unique in the annals of the Revolution, an uprising which, taking birth among the oppressed peasants, was sustained by all the toilers of the raion. When external forces tried to suppress it, the Revolution in Gulyai-Pole exploded into a colossal movement which, alas, never reached its full development. It would be necessary to be present, I say, to be convinced of the seriousness and the extreme care with which the toilers approached a question which in other places in Ukraine would have given rise to beatings and killings of poor Jews, the innocent victims throughout Russian and Ukrainian history who have not enjoyed peace up to this time.

Certainly I had something to do with the way things were handled, but I made no attempt to diminish the significance of the problem and laid out all the evidence before the assembly. The assembly decided to leave matters to the conscience of the Jewish community. But it issued a stern warning to the leaders of that community that a repetition of actions inimical to the freedom of Gulyai-Pole would be answered in a different way. They would then be dragged before a revolutionary tribunal.

And thus the issue was settled. The right of Jews to participate in meetings of the Soviets, to take part in the debates and decisions, was not abrogated in any way. We acknowledged the right of each person, without distinction, to freely express their opinion, provided they accepted and respected the right to destroy all that was harmful to the development of social Revolution, because the new Society which was struggling to be born demanded great sacrifices and prodigious efforts from our collective, creative forces.

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Up to this time in Gulyai-Pole and its raion there existed a territorial unit known as the “zemstvo”. But this term was no longer used because the Soviet had taken over all the social

functions and, with the approval of the General Assembly of peasants, set up a Revkom charged with organizing and training our revolutionary armed forces.

The following were invited to belong to the Revkom: the Anarchist Communist Group, the SRs (there were a few of them in the raion), and the Ukrainian SRs grouped around the "Prosvit" movement (having as leader the agronomist Dmitrenko). As for the Bolsheviks, there just weren't any of them.

The formation of the Revkom was the result of tactical considerations by the Soviet which were endorsed by the Anarchist Communist Group. The Revkom, as an independent revolutionary entity authorized by the triumphant Left Bloc, would allow us to do a better job organizing the peasantry.

Our strength at that time did not allow us to address the needs of urban workers and indeed we still cherished vain illusions about our anarchist comrades in the cities. They existed in a vacuum without any connection with the revolutionary course of events and engaged in sterile discussions, totally useless for our work.

In setting up the Revkom, the Soviet was faced with the question: which member should be entrusted with the ideological direction of the Revkom? The Soviet wanted to have an anarchist in this position and appointed me although I by no means pursued the job. I knew that no matter where I ended up, the Revkom would follow the line of the Anarchist Communist Group, studied and refined by the Soviet and the Revkom and supported by the population.

As a result of prolonged discussion, the leadership of the Revkom, constituted as a military-revolutionary body, was entrusted to me. This position demanded initiative and decisive action.

After my departure from the Soviet there was a move to install Maxim Shramko as the new chairperson. A non-party worker-sailor, he was former head of the zemstvo, a post which I had categorically refused. (I even left Gulyai-Pole temporarily when they were electing the zemstvo head in order to avoid listening to the arguments of the peasants trying to persuade me to run for this position.) But Shramko, after I had gone to the front in Aleksandrovsk, gathered a band of marauders and led them to the Kosovtze-Tkhomirov estate (about two kilometres from Gulyai-Pole) which, on my initiative, had been converted to an orphanage. He tore apart the valuable library (only half the books were ever salvaged) and removed the window frames. By doing this he discredited himself in the eyes of the peasants who had previously held him in high esteem. He was not entrusted with the chair of the Soviet and instead was given the task of making an inventory of equipment and livestock available on the estates of the pomeshchiks in preparation for the redistribution planned for the spring.

The chair of the Soviet was awarded to the Comrade Luc Korostilev, an active member of our group before the Revolution, now only a fellow traveller.

The Anarchist Communist Group asked that the functions of the Revkom be clearly defined. The Revkom declared publicly that its main task was the revolutionary organization of the toilers in order to unite all of them in the struggle to maintain the development and triumph of the Revolution. The Revkom recognized that the Revolution was under attack from all sides by enemies which were trying to reduce the toilers to a passive instrument in the hands of political parties struggling to seize power.

Then the Anarchist Communist Group demanded that the Revkom take the initiative in disarming a battalion of the Berdyansk 48<sup>th</sup> regiment which was stationed in the city of Orehov (35 versts from Gulyai-Pole). These troops were more or less evenly divided between supporters of General Kaledin and supporters of the Central Rada. The Revkom was still too weak to take

on an action of this sort (which the Anarchist Communist Group understood), but expressed its whole-hearted support for the idea. The Anarchist Communist Group then arranged to collaborate with the Aleksandrovsk Federation of Anarchists. The two groups converged on Orekhov from two sides and disarmed the battalion.

The reaction from the ruling authorities of the Left Bloc was one of enthusiastic approval. Their regional commander, Bogdanov, said he was amazed and overjoyed at the actions of the anarchists and impatiently expected the weapons seized from the battalion to be turned over, either to him or to the Aleksandrovsk Revkom. He felt confident this would happen because M. Nikiforova, still a member of that Revkom, had taken part in the seizure of weapons.

But there was no way that was going to happen.

The Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group had persistently followed its own line from July-August, 1917: to gain the hearts and minds of the peasantry and to encourage and support in them the spirit of freedom and independence. The best members of the Group, many of whom had already perished, had been struggling to do this for 12 years. Now, when the Group had emerged from the underground and could speak openly, it proselytized its ideal with the sincerity and persistence of an apostle in clear and simple language accessible to the peasants without recourse to nebulous, meaningless phrases from yesteryear. The Group wanted to see its work brought to fruition; it decided this was the appropriate moment to create a military force without which the labouring classes would not be able to cope with their numerous enemies. The Aleksandrovsk Federation supported us in this. Therefore all the weapons: rifles, grenade launchers, and machine guns were transported to Gulyai-Pole and officially placed at the disposition of the Gulyai-Pole Revkom.

The toilers of Gulyai-Pole and the neighbouring villages and countryside became still more resolute. They sent their own representatives to Gulyai-Pole with declarations about their willingness, both young and old, to take up arms to defend their independence and freedom from any power, even the revolutionary power of the Left Bloc if it should try to interfere with the new forms of life which the peasants had freely developed among themselves.

I, as director of the Revkom, would have been entirely tied up in its business if our Revkom had been like the other ones of that time. But every day, even several times a day, the Anarchist Communist Group pulled me away from my work to meet with various representatives of the peasantry from various villages or even other raions. These peasants never failed to present themselves at the office of the Anarchist Communist Group to find out the latest plans of the Group, plans which had not yet been publicized by our itinerant propagandists. We went over our projects with them, trying to decide where would be a good place to begin such and such and how to defend our work from the authorities.

“What happiness!” exclaimed the peasants who visited the Anarchist Communist Group, the Revkom, or the Soviet. “We are really starting to feel the soil of liberty under our feet.” And their joy was immense.

Our work took on gigantic proportions. But our financial resources were completely inadequate.

I and number of the other comrades were preoccupied with this problem because the organization of combat forces required a considerable outlay of money. I knew that I had only to apply to the Aleksandrovsk Revkom and they would send the necessary funds. But I didn’t want us to do this, either in my own name or on behalf of the Group, because my goal was to create a

revolutionary bloc of peasants entirely independent of any political party and especially of any government institution.

After long hesitation, I decided to propose that the Group discuss the following: in Gulyai-Pole there was a branch of the Commercial Bank which we had deliberately not confiscated so far. The funds of the bank were located in the Aleksandrovsk State Treasury, but the branch still carried on paper work, hoping that after the October Revolution it could return to its old job of earning profits for the idle rich. It occurred to me to propose to the bank that it deposit a certain sum of money for the needs of the Revkom.

I recall that we wrestled with this idea for over a week. The Group was against the idea in principle. It is only with difficulty that I extracted a promise from the Group not to prevent me from presenting this question to the Revkom. I promised to take full responsibility if the bankers refused to go along with my proposition voluntarily.

In giving its consent, the Group warned me that, according to our internal code, it could require me to give up the Revkom and the Soviet and confine myself exclusively to working for the Group. I was always prepared for this. I had even insisted on this more than anyone else when we drafted the articles concerning the unity of the Group and the duties of members towards the Group and its work.

I received a guarantee from the Group that our other members on the Revkom would support my proposition to ask the banks to contribute 250,000 roubles for the needs of the Revkom. Then I called a joint meeting of the Revkom and the Executive Committee of the Soviet.

I opened the meeting by announcing that there were unverified rumours that Central Rada was carrying on negotiations for a peace treaty with the Germans and that the Bolsheviks, breaking with their Left SR allies and with the revolutionary population, were also in a big hurry to make peace with the German kaiser.

“It’s true,” I said to the gathering, “that these stories must be verified and that will be done in the next few days. But I can personally affirm in complete certainty that the Central Rada has already concluded a dishonourable alliance with the German and Austrian emperors, Karl and Wilhelm. [Note: I had some letters from Odessa and Khotin, delivered by a comrade, which confirmed this news.]

This is the decisive moment of the Revolution. Victorious will be those who prepare themselves in time. We must arm ourselves to the teeth and we must arm the whole population, since the Central Rada and the Bolsheviks, by allying themselves with the emperors, will kill the Revolution. We must prepare to be attacked, we must repel the attack and thus save our revolutionary conquests.

We must make our way without any compromises, without any dependence on the revolutionary authority of the Left Bloc, the same as we did for the Central Rada and the coalition of Kerensky with the bourgeoisie. To succeed, we must act independently on all fronts of the Revolution.”

Then I explained that we needed money and that the uyezd Revkom in Aleksandrovsk would be delighted if we asked it for money but that this would be fatal for the Revolution in Gulyai-Pole. For that would give the uyezd authorities a lever to try to suppress our liberty and independence.

“But we need money and the money we need is right here in Gulyai-Pole or, at least, we can get it here without having to suck up to the authorities and give them the

idea that we will soon be prostrating ourselves before them. As long as we use our heads, we won't have to go begging."

Several voices interrupted: "Tell us, Comrade Makhno, where is this dough and how can we access it for the common good?"

"I'll explain that to you in good time. But first I want to say a word about what I see in our own ranks and in the ranks of our enemies. Of course our enemies are of various sorts on the various fronts but they say they are fighting for liberty; against reaction; whereas in practice they are fighting for reaction, against liberty.

Comrades, none of us here will deny that among the toiling peasants the desire for independence and freedom from economic and political slavery has grown and grown. And who helped the peasants to develop in this way? Why the Revolution itself and the persistent, hard-working members of the Anarchist Communist Group of which I am a member.

What the results will be of this raised consciousness among the peasants it's hard to say at the moment, since we have so many enemies and so very few friends. And our friends aren't even where we need them. They are holed up in the cities and show themselves occasionally. I'm referring to the anarchists. They and only they do not want the oppressed countryside to remain oppressed by the urban authorities. But they make little effort to help the oppressed peasants compared to what they could be doing. There are reasons for this, it's true, but it's difficult to explain and hardly worth the effort. Nevertheless the anarchists are always with us in spirit!"

[My speech was interrupted by applause and cries of "Long live anarchism! Long live the anarchists – our friends!"]

Calm yourselves, friends, I'm getting to the main point. The main point is that we must arm ourselves, we must arm the whole population so that the Revolution will have a powerful army so we can begin to build the New Society ourselves, with our own means, with our own reason, our own work, and our own will.

The toilers of this raion have, since the autumn of 1917, begun this task but now find themselves menaced by the black forces of reaction: the authority, on the one hand, of the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs; on the other hand, the Ukrainian Central Rada. The Central Rada, I'm reliably informed, has formed an alliance with the rulers of Austria and Germany and with their help will deliver, under the banner of saving 'Mother Ukraine', death to all the wonderful revolutionary gains made by the Ukrainian toilers.

Arming the whole population is feasible only if the population recognizes its necessity. During the past week, I have received here at the Revkom, and the secretary of the AK Group has received at his office, many representatives of the peasants from all over the raion who have spoken with one voice about the necessity of arming of the people.

But this isn't enough: we must go out to the peasant assemblies and hear the same will expressed there. Then we must discuss with the peasants how we can realize this

goal with the best results. So now we need to send out propagandists everywhere. We'll have to interrupt the peasants' preparations for spring sowing so we can borrow wagons and horses. Or we can rent conveyances. Either way we must pay for them. So we need money.

We don't have any money, but our enemies do — right here in Gulyai-Pole in the homes of the pomeshchiks and merchants. Their bank is almost next door!

I must say to you, nevertheless, comrades, that the bank vault is empty. All the cash is in the State Bank in Aleksandrovsk. But we can still have it. It's a matter of accepting my proposition.

The whole time the Revolution has been going on, the Credit Bank in Gulyai-Pole has been speculating and pillaging at the expense of labour. Truly, it should have been expropriated long ago and its assets transferred to a common fund for the toilers. Neither the Coalition Government of Kerensky nor the Bolshevik-Left-SR government have done so and they have prevented the revolutionary people from doing so. That's why I propose that the Gulyai-Pole Raion Revkom resolve to disregard the Left Bloc government and demand that the directors of the bank hand over to the Revkom 250,000 roubles to be used for revolutionary goals and that they do so within 24 hours."

This resolution was passed unanimously.

The next day I went to the bank and informed the directors about this resolution. They asked the Revkom to extend the time limit to three days. Then they called a general meeting of their depositors at which the SD Zbar was the Revkom's representative. With his encouragement, the depositors signed cheques proportional to the size of their deposits in the bank. As for those depositors who didn't show up at the bank meeting, they received visits from an agent of the bank accompanied by a member of the Revkom. In the course of four days all the cheques were collected and on the fifth day a member of the Revkom empowered by the bank travelled to Aleksandrovsk and received the correct sum of money.

The toilers of Gulyai-Pole thus assured the success of the first stages of the Revolution by acquiring the pecuniary means for revolutionary propaganda and the organizing of Labour against Capital and State Power.

Part of the money was put at the disposal of the Soviet for social needs. A second portion was, on my initiative, set aside for founding and maintaining an orphanage for children who had lost their parents as a result of war. A third part, the largest, was turned over to the Revkom. Half of this sum was made available for the temporary use of the Provisioning Section of the Soviet. This section, created by the Soviet and approved by the General Assembly of peasants and workers, was directed by Comrade Seregin from the Anarchist Communist Group. The function of this section was to provide the population with necessary goods of consumption. It was so successful at this that it soon attracted the envy of the central authorities who began to place obstacles in its way.

## **Chapter 25: How the exchange of goods between city and village was organized and how we struggled to make it work**

From the beginning of its work in organizing the peasants, the Anarchist Communist Group had insisted on the necessity of carrying on this work in an anarchist manner. We needed to apply anarchist principles consistently in a various contexts.

At first our tactics aroused protests from some members of the Group. Although entirely devoted to the cause, they were used to the old ways: negation of organization, of unity of action, of the possibility of remaining anarchists while applying its principles under a regime that was not anarchist, not even truly socialist. I was often told: "Comrade Nestor, apparently in prison you became imbued with statist ways of getting things done and now you are carried away with doing things that way and this will lead to a split in our group." In particular, this thought was often and sharply expressed to me by Comrade Moise Kalinichenko, my old friend who had been a member of our group from 1907, a self-educated worker who was ideologically rock-solid.

Nevertheless, everything I proposed was accepted by the group and put into practice among the peasants during 1917 with the greatest success. Indeed, the peasants listened to us with an attentiveness and confidence which they did not extend to any other social or political group. The peasants followed the guidance of our group in the following areas: the land question, the negation of authority over their own lives, and the struggle against oppression no matter what the source. This showed the way for our comrades: to not separate oneself from the masses but to dissolve oneself among them while remaining true to one's ideals, and then to struggle forward despite all the obstacles which the politicos put in the way and which held back the movement.

Thus the members of our group became accustomed to the principle of collective unity in action and, even more important, in action which was well thought-out and fruitful. They learned to have confidence in one another and respect one another's competence in their own area of expertise.

These characteristics, essential in the life and struggle of any organization — and especially an anarchist organization — allowed our group to hold together before the vicissitudes which faced the Ukrainian toilers in those years when "governments" multiplied: one in Petrograd, another in Kursk, a third in Kiev, etc. And they all tried to plant their foot on the neck of the toilers, to control them and rule over them.

The reciprocal confidence of our members led to the spontaneous enthusiasm which allowed each of them to display the energy and initiative which the Group directed towards goals established by common accord. A good example of this was the maximum of initiative shown by the comrade who directed the Provisioning Section. The Group encouraged him to make use of his authority as head of the provisioning organ to establish direct connections between Gulyai-Pole raion and workers of textile factories in Moscow and other cities for the purpose of exchang-

ing goods. The workers would supply the population of Gulyai-Pole raion with textiles of pre-determined quality, colour, and quantity and the raion would provide them with grain and other produce needed by the workers.

Comrade Seregin sent his own agents to the cities and travelled all over the raion himself to meet worker delegations which were scouring the countryside looking to find grain they could buy. These delegations were under the control of members of the Cheka and other government functionaries. In the course of two weeks he established connections with workers of the textile factories of Prokhorov and Morozov. They agreed in a comradely way on the necessity for toilers struggling for freedom and independence to support each other: the peasants sending grain and other foodstuffs to the workers, the workers furnishing the peasants with textiles.

I recall with what great joy Comrade Seregin, upon his return to Gulyai-Pole, without taking time to stop at his own apartment, ran to find me at the Revkom and hugged me, saying: "You were right, Nestor, when you insisted to the Group on the necessity of fusing ourselves with the labouring population: explaining, advising, and moving forward with them towards our goals. All the toilers are behind us."

Then he asked to speak to the secretary of the Group — Comrade Kalashnikov and the chairperson of the workers' section of the Soviet — Comrade Antonov. He told them how warmly, how sincerely the worker delegation of the Moscow textile factories received our idea of the direct exchange of goods. He said the worker delegation was overjoyed to learn that the ideal of a free society was not dead in the countryside because this ideal had cost the workers many sacrifices. They had the feeling that over their cherished dream — to live free and independent lives without being subject to oppression — was hanging a threatening cloud.

"It's true," said the workers, "we can't let ourselves get discouraged, but we can't help but be depressed about the situation which is developing."

Comrade Seregin told us that the worker delegation was delighted to meet the peasants, delighted to make the agreement for mutual aid, but was also worried that the government's food requisitioning detachments would stop and even confiscate our shipments to the city.

The worker delegation had instructed Comrade Seregin on how to sent produce to the city. Two or three days later two members of the delegation arrived in Gulyai-Pole in order to sound out the mood of the peasants in this insurgent raion. They were met with fraternal hospitality and were assured that we were committed to defending the great principles of the Revolution — liberty and the freedom to work without being subject to the authority of capital and the state.

After several days these two worker delegates left for Moscow.

Comrade Seregin made a report to the General Assembly of peasants, a report to which, at the request of Comrade Seregin and Anarchist Communist Group, I added some depth. I pointed out that this was the finest example in history of a reciprocal agreement between two labouring classes: the proletarians and the peasants.

The General Assembly approved the scheme with enthusiasm, not worrying that their shipments might be confiscated by government agents. The peasants helped the Provisioning Section over the course of several days to load several wagons for speedy dispatch to the workers of the textile factories.

The Anarchist Communist Group formed a detachment, commanded by Comrade Skomski, to accompany this shipment all the way. And the grain, despite all sorts of delays deliberately caused by the commandants at railway junctions on the route, eventually reached its destination.

About ten days later, the textile workers of Moscow dispatched several railway wagons of textiles to Gulyai-Pole. But en route blocking detachments of the government food organs stopped it and directed it to the Provisioning Centre in Aleksandrovsk.

“Because,” said the government agents, “without the permission of the central Soviet authority, it’s impossible for peasants and workers to exchange goods. Soviet power hasn’t yet provided any examples of direct exchanges between workers and peasants and until it does we can’t allow this to go on.” This rationale was accompanied by all kinds of verbal abuse directed at the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion and the Anarchist Communist Group.

Informed of this incident, Comrade Seregin ran to the Revkom and asked for my advice on what to do to prevent the Aleksandrovsk government organ from confiscating the textile shipment.

“For if we don’t receive the textiles,” he cried, “our suffering will be doubled: materially, because the grain is gone, and morally, because our beautiful social initiative will have failed. Help!” He wept, holding his head in his hands.

Keeping our calm, at least in appearance, we convoked an emergency meeting of the Revkom and Soviet and decided to send a protest to the Provisioning Section of Aleksandrovsk in the name of our two revolutionary organizations. We complained about the anti-revolutionary action of seizing a shipment which was intended to go elsewhere and we said we were prepared to label the Section as harmful to the Soviet government, if indeed it was really part of that government.

At the same time we called a General Assembly of the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Pole. I also decided to dispatch three members of the Anarchist Communist Group — Moisei Kalinichenko, A. Marchenko, and P. Sokruta — who also happened to be members of the Revkom, to inform the toilers of the whole raion about the seizure by the government Provisioning Section of Aleksandrovsk of the textiles sent to them by the factory workers of Moscow.

The secretary of the Anarchist Communist Group, Comrade Kalinichenko, after conferring with a number of members who had arrived for the General Assembly, told me that my initiative had been approved by the Group. I wrote down quickly the essential points that our agents would have to put across. I knew these comrades well and what they were capable of accomplishing.

Our three agents left and I went to the General Assembly, accompanied by Comrades Antonov (president of the Professional Union), Seregin, and Korostelev (president of the Soviet).

This was truly a meeting of the old “Zaporozhian Sich” as we knew it from the history books. The peasants were not as credulous as in olden times and they no longer met to discuss questions of church and faith. Now they met to talk about the violation of their rights by a handful of government officials; and they were fully conscious of those rights.

Comrade Seregin took the floor. His speech was greeted with incessant applause for his initiative and cries of indignation against the actions of Aleksandrovsk.

After Comrade Seregin, others spoke on behalf of the Soviet, the Revkom, the Trade Union, and the Anarchist Communist Group.

The population demanded an immediate march on Aleksandrovsk to drive out the authorities entrenched there — authorities who were useless, indeed doing harm to the toilers. This demand was not just a matter of empty phrases: the toilers at that time had at their disposal numbers of militant youth quite sufficient to occupy the city of Aleksandrovsk and expel, if not shoot outright, the government functionaries.

“The Revolution proclaimed the principles of freedom, equality, and free labour,” said the oppressed toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion, “and we intend to see these principles applied. We shall

kill all who try to stop us. The government of the Left Bloc, in spite of its revolutionary character, is harmful to the creative forces of the Revolution. We will destroy it or we will die trying. We will not tolerate the obstacles this government puts in the way of the free development of our forces and the improvement of our social condition. We will not accept the humiliation and oppression which this government's agents seek to impose on us and on all that is beautiful in the Revolution."

Yes, the labouring population of Gulyai-Pole on that day was ready to rise up against the government of Aleksandrovsk. And who was against this idea? Why no one! We, who had been militants from the first days of the Revolution, would not recoil from such an act because we weren't the kind of revolutionaries who need a party membership card in their pocket to prove their militancy. We were revolutionaries because we were dedicated to the idea of the triumph of justice — the idea the Revolution had chosen as its credo. We couldn't allow this inspirational idea to be soiled by compromise with the authorities. We considered it our duty to keep this credo from being soiled by the two parties ruling at that time — the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. We strove to broaden, deepen, and develop further the Revolution in the lives and struggles of the toilers.

Certainly we did not have sufficient forces for such a momentous task. Nevertheless we wanted to make the attempt with the forces we had at our disposal, knowing full well what would be the real results of such an effort.

That's why there was not one comrade among us who spoke against marching on Aleksandrovsk — on the contrary, everybody was up for it.

I was personally convinced that the time was ripe for myself and several comrades (Kalinichenko, Marchenko, Petya Isidor, Lyutyi, S. Karetnik, Savva Makhno, Stepan Shepel) to become first among equals and lead the revolutionary forces into combat. And it seemed, indeed, that this was really going to happen.

Some cries rang out from the crowd: "Nestor Ivanovich, tell us your opinion! We must respond to this shameful provocation directed against us by the agents of the government in Aleksandrovsk."

I, as the chief of the revolutionary troops of the raion, knew what these troops were capable of. I said what I had to say: that the decision of the toilers in this case reflected their beliefs, that I shared their beliefs, and would carry out their wishes.

At this moment Comrade Seregin received a telegram from the Aleksandrovsk Government Provisioning Section. This telegram announced that the Provisioning Section of Aleksandrovsk had received the telegram from the Gulyai-Pole Revkom and Soviet, and acknowledged that the textiles re-directed to the Section had already been paid for by the toilers of Gulyai-Pole. Therefore the Section, in agreement with other Soviet organs in Aleksandrovsk uyezd, had decided to allow the textiles to be released to Gulyai-Pole. It was only a matter of sending some people to receive the shipment and accompany it to Gulyai-Pole.

When this telegram was read out to the General Assembly, the audience rejoiced but they by no means abandoned the idea of preparing for armed resistance. The meeting expressed the wish that Comrade N. Makhno organize the armed forces so that if Comrade Seregin had not received the textiles within two days, the troops could be mobilized within a day and the city of Aleksandrovsk occupied.

“We have no reason to march at the moment,” said the peasants. “We’re not looking to pick a fight over nothing. But we should be ready to march whenever it’s necessary — that’s what we think now and that’s how we will think in the future.”

Within a day Comrade Seregin told the Revkom that he had received news from the agents he had dispatched to the effect that they had received the goods and they had now arrived at the Gulyai-Pole station. Therefore he called another General Assembly of peasants and workers at which he was empowered to ask the peasants to help organize the transport of the textiles to the provisioning depot and also to arrange for distributing the textiles to the population of Gulyai-Pole.

Comrade Seregin asked me, as well as other comrades from the Revkom and the Anarchist Communist Group to attend the meeting and help him explain to the population the advantages of such exchanges between city and country, exchanges which ought to be carried out on a greater scale and extended to all branches of consumption.

The General Assembly proceeded under the following theme: how to arrange the exchange of goods between city and country without the intermediary of state power.

The example was before our eyes: without the intermediary the country would get to know the city better and city would get to know the country better. This was a necessary condition for successfully unifying the two class forces of labour for the common goal — to relieve the State of all power over public functions and abolish its social authority; in short, to abolish it.

To the extent that this great idea developed itself among the toilers in Gulyai-Pole and its raion, to the extent that they adopted it, they took up the struggle against the authoritarian principles which were impeding them. The toilers grasped the importance of these exchanges of goods and affirmed their right to carrying out these exchanges.

At the same they also saw such exchanges as a way of undermining the bases of capitalism in the Revolution, vestiges which remained from tsarist times. That’s why, after all the textiles had been distributed, the population of Gulyai-Pole considered how they might extend the exchanges to all essential objects of consumption. This would prove that the Revolution was not just about destroying the bases of the bourgeois-capitalist system, but also about planning the construction of a new society on a basis of equality in which would grow and develop the free consciousness of the toilers. Their lives would then be devoted to the struggle for a “higher justice” in place of the injustice which now prevailed and which was rooted in people exploiting and oppressing one another.

The toilers of Gulyai-Pole conferred with the toilers of other villages and raions in order to bring about the exchange of goods between city and country and to coordinate this with the existing situation where the Revolution had to be defended. But the defence of the Revolution will be steadfast and durable only if the non-exploiting classes recognize its essentially creative character. This can only happen when, after casting off the yoke of the bosses — the factory owner and the estate owner — and that of the supreme boss — the State — the people organize themselves for their new social and political life and that they defend it. Consequently, it is essential that the toilers of the villages, in order to better understand and defend more effectively the creative principles of the Revolution, draw closer to the city workers. The village toilers will thus have a better sense of their role in creating the Revolution.

The destructive period of the Revolution will be completed only when the creative phase begins, the phase which will involve not only the revolutionary vanguard (and its detachments),

but the whole population, Inspired by the flame of the Revolution, the people will try to help it, in acts and in words, to overcome the obstacles which turn up.

During the ten or eleven months of their active participation in the Revolution, the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion had many occasions to verify the correctness of this scheme and apply it to develop their own lives in a free and healthy way — forged by them daily in their own practical activity.

This healthy social phenomenon in the life and struggle of the toilers generally and of the toilers of Gulyai-Pole raion in particular could not help but be noticed by the Left Bloc headed by Lenin. The Left Bloc noticed this phenomenon from the first days of its appearance on the revolutionary scene. And this so-called ultra-left socialist power entered into open struggle with it. First this affected communications between city and country, and then the authorities took on the role of determining the degree of revolutionary character and legal rights not only of individuals, but of the whole working class. We're talking here about the right to use their own intelligence, their own will, about their very participation in the Revolution on whose behalf it was supposedly being carried out.

Thus the textiles, coming from the city factory workers to the peasants in exchange for the products of agriculture produced through the peasants' labour, were distributed among the population of Gulyai-Pole and its raion by the Gulyai-Pole Co-operative and the Food Board. The raion Soviet, together with the provisioning organizations, decided it was necessary to broaden and deepen the concept of exchanging goods between city and country without the usual intermediaries — agents of the state and their functionaries.

Delegates were sent to several cities to investigate various questions concerning the practical side of goods exchange. Meanwhile the peasants began to build up stocks of wheat, flour, and other food products in a special warehouse which henceforth was designated to store goods destined for future exchange. This time, however, our delegates returned for the most part with empty hands. The authorities of the Left Bloc had, in all the workplaces, categorically forbidden the proletarian organizations from entering into any sort of direct relationship with the villages. For this purpose there existed — according to the authorities — proletarian organizations: Prodorgans. These statist entities were charged with organizing the industrial and agricultural development of the cities and villages, thereby consolidating socialism in the whole country.

Only in Moscow were the revolutionary workers of the textile factories able to obtain from the ruling socialists the right to exchange once more their goods against the products of Gulyai-Pole raion. But the shipment of textiles was extremely difficult. It was stopped several times en route. The government "prodorgans" shunted them from one railway siding to another for over two weeks until rail transport came to a complete halt because of the war situation. Powerful German armies, accompanied by detachments of the Central Rada and the Ukrainian SRs and SDs, were advancing on Kiev and Odessa. The leaders of the Ukrainian SRs and SDs, Professor Hrushevsky and the publicist O. Vinnichenko respectively, had concluded an alliance with the German and Austrian emperors directed against the Left Bloc. Now these Ukrainian SRs and SDs were leading their allies onto Ukrainian soil and showing them the shortest and most practical routes towards the Dnepr and the Revolutionary Front.

To the agents of the Left Bloc regime there was a choice: either abandon the textile shipment somewhere on the railway, thus leaving it to the new authorities who would receive their marching orders from the Germans and Austrians; or send it to its proper destination, thereby showing

the toilers of the cities and villages that, despite the retreat and the scoundrels who were taking over, their needs still counted.

The shipment finally arrived in Gulyai-Pole and was shared out according to the wishes of the inhabitants.

## Chapter 26: New members of our Group

Towards the middle of February three sailors from the Black Sea Fleet arrived in Gulyai-Pole. Two of them were peasants from Gulyai-Pole, the third was a stranger to us. He was visiting with his father who served as a coachman for the pomeshchik Abraham Jantzen. All three called themselves Left SRs. Two of them, Boris Veretel'nik (peasant of Gulyai-Pole) and E. Polonsky (the stranger) had party membership cards from the Sevastopol Committee of the Party of Left SRs. The third, Sharovsky, also a peasant of Gulyai-Pole, was not a party member.

All three from the first days of their arrival in Gulyai-Pole showed up at general assemblies and made an impression as energetic revolutionary workers. That was a time when sailors were renowned as fearless defenders of the Revolution. The inhabitants of Gulyai-Pole welcomed them with respect and listened to their speeches with interest.

Comrade Veretel'nik was familiar to me from childhood. So when he introduced me to his two companions I had no reason not to trust them. I presented all three to the Raion Revkom in Gulyai-Pole and they were admitted as members of the propaganda section of the Committee on conditions that all their agitation work in Gulyai-Pole and its raion would be carried out under the banner of the Revkom. This condition was accepted by them and they settled down to work in Gulyai-Pole.

The Sevastopol Committee of the Party of Left SRs summoned Veretel'nik and Polonsky back to Sevastopol but I, at their request and with the consent of the Anarchist Communist Group, wrote to the Sevastopol Committee in the name of the Gulyai-Pole Revkom that they were needed in the village. And the Party didn't bother them any more.

Shortly after this, Comrade Veretel'nik severed his connections with the Party of Left SRs and joined the Gulyai-Pole Anarchist Communist Group. Comrade Polonsky remained outside the Group but declared himself sympathetic to anarchism. He worked with Comrade Veretel'nik and other members of the Group, taking part in all their activities in Gulyai-Pole and its raion and giving an account of his work just as if he were a member.

Several times, it's true, the brother of Polonsky, a Bolshevik who belonged to the Revkom in Bolshoi Tokmak, invited our Polonsky to join him, promising him a position on the executive of the Revkom. But our Polonsky always refused, not wanting to leave Gulyai-Pole where the revolutionary spirit was infectious and his organizing work gave him great satisfaction.

The strength of our group was increasing. Our revolutionary work broadened. The Group was entirely devoted to it. There was no obstacle which could prevent us from winning over the revolutionary masses intellectually and spiritually.

Always the Group was in the vanguard of the Revolution, leading the toilers in their struggle against the oppressors. In the way it operated, the Group set an example of autonomous self-activity of peasants and workers. It taught them how to be activists and saw the results being put into practice by the toilers.

## Chapter 27: The agrarian communes; their organization; their enemies

February – March, 1918. The moment had come to distribute the livestock and implements which had been seized from the pomeshchiks in the autumn of 1917 and to organize agrarian communes on the former estates. All the toilers of the raion understood the importance of decisive action at this moment, both for the construction of a new life, and for its defence. Under the direction of the Revkom, ex-soldiers from the Front began moving all the implements and livestock from the estates of the pomeshchiks and large farms to a central holding area. Their former owners were left with two pairs of horses, one or two cows (depending on the size of the family), one plough, one seeding machine, one mower, one winnowing machine, etc. Meanwhile the peasants went to the fields to finish the division of the land begun in the fall. At the same time some peasants and workers, previously organized into agrarian communes, left their villages and, with their whole families, took possession of the former properties of the pomeshchiks. In doing so, they paid no attention to the fact that the Red Guard units of the Left Bloc, after the agreement with the emperors of Austria and Germany, had evacuated Ukraine. The remaining revolutionary military formations could offer only token resistance to the regular German and Austrian troops who were supported by the armed bands of the Central Rada.

Once the communes were set up, their members, without losing any time, began to organize themselves: some were employed in the normal springtime agricultural work, while others formed combat groups to defend the Revolution and its conquests. The same thing happened in other raions, setting an example for the whole country.

The majority of the agricultural communes were composed of peasants; a minority were a mixture of peasants and workers. Their organization was based on equality and the solidarity. All members of these communes – both men and women – brought a very positive attitude to their work, whether it was in the field or domestic work.

The communes had common kitchens and dining halls. But the wish of any members to prepare their own food for their families, or to prepare food in the communal kitchen and then carry it home, never met with any objection from the other members. Each member, or even a whole group, could organize their feeding any way they wished, on condition, however, that they give advance notice to the other members so the appropriate dispositions could be made in the communal kitchen and pantry.

The members of a commune were also required to get up early to tend to the cattle and horses and take care of other domestic chores.

Members of the commune had the right to absent themselves, but they were required to advise their work partner in advance so a replacement could be found. This applied to normal work days. On days of rest (Sundays) members took turns going on excursions.

The program of work of the whole commune was worked out during meetings of all the members. Each of the members knew exactly what was expected from them.

Only the question of schools remained open, because the communes did not want to re-establish schools of the former type; among the new schools the first choice was the anarchist model of F. Ferrer which was well known to the communes because of the activities of the Anarchist Communist Group which distributed brochures on the subject. But people trained in the methods of this school were lacking and the communes tried to recruit them from the cities, through the intermediary of the Anarchist Communist Group. If this proved impossible, it was decided, at least for the first year, to get people who were simply able to teach the school subjects.

There existed within a seven or eight kilometre radius from Gulyai-Pole four of these communes. There were many others in the raion. If I dwell on these four, it is because I organized them personally. Their first initiative took place under my supervision, and all the important questions were always submitted to me for advice.

As a member of one of these communes, probably the largest one, I helped out two days a week in all facets of the operation: in the springtime in the fields behind the bukker or the seeding machine; before and after the seeding I did other types of farm work or helped the mechanic at the electric station.

The remaining four days of the week I worked in Gulyai-Pole, in the Anarchist Communist Group or the raion Revkom. This work regime was expected of me by the Group and all the communes and lasted until the defence of the Revolution required the mobilizing of all available forces. For, advancing from the west was the Counter-Revolution in the form of the German and Austro-Hungarian imperial armies and the Central Rada.

In all the communes there were peasant anarchists, but the majority of their members were not anarchists. However the internal life of the commune was a model of anarchist solidarity. In today's world, only the simple natures of toilers not yet affected by the poisonous atmosphere of the cities are capable of such spontaneous solidarity. The cities always emanate an odour of lies and betrayal which infect even many so-called anarchists.

Each commune was composed of a dozen families of peasants and workers, reaching a size of 100, 200, or even 300 members. Each commune received from former estates of pomeshchiks, by the decision of the Raion Congress of Land Committees, a quantity of land which it would be able to farm with its own labour. Moreover, the communes received the livestock and machinery which were already on the property.

And the free toilers of the communes set to work, singing happy songs as they did so. Their songs reflected the spirit of the Revolution, the spirit of those warriors who propagated revolution for many years and had perished or remained alive and implacable in the struggle for "higher justice" which must triumph over injustice, a struggle which must intensify and become a beacon for all humanity.

The toilers sowed the fields and worked in the vegetable gardens, full of confidence in themselves and in their strong resolution to not allow the former proprietors to recover lands which they had never worked with their own hands, lands which the proprietors had possessed by the authority of the State and which they were attempting to seize again.

The inhabitants of the villages and hamlets adjacent to these communes often had a lower level of political consciousness and were not yet completely liberated from sucking up to the "kulaks". These people envied the communards and frequently expressed the desire to confiscate the livestock and machinery left by the pomeshchiks and divide them up among themselves.

"The communards could always buy them back from us later, if they want to," they said. But this attitude was severely condemned by a vast majority of the toilers at congresses and other

meetings. The majority of the labouring population saw the organizing of agricultural communes as the healthy beginning of a new social life which, as the Revolution approached the culmination of its creative phase, would grow and develop and stimulate similar phenomena throughout the whole country, or at least in all the villages and hamlets of the raion.

The structure of the free communes was considered by the toilers as the most advanced form of a just society. Nevertheless, most of the toilers decided not to join communes at that time because of the approach of German-Austrian troops, their own lack of organization, and their inability to defend the new system against both “revolutionary” and counter-revolutionary authorities.

That's why the revolutionary toilers of the raion contented themselves with trying to support in every way those among them — the boldest ones — who had organized themselves into free agrarian communes on the former properties of the pomeshchiks and were leading an independent life there on new social bases.

A certain number of the pomeshchiks and kulaks, as well as some of the German colonists, realized that one way or another they could not continue as owners of thousands of dessyatins of land, exploiting the work of others. Without hesitating any longer, they sided with the Revolution and organized their lives on a new basis, i.e. without using batrak labour and without enjoying the right to rent out their land.

However, at the moment when the oppressed were seized with joy everywhere on liberated soil; when the toilers, oppressed and degraded by political, economic, and social inequality, began to be conscious of their own slavery and sought to be rid of this disgrace once and for all; when it seemed that this liberation was on the point of being accomplished, for the toilers had already become the direct exponents of this concept; when the ideas of freedom, equality, and solidarity among the people began gradually to permeate their lives and simultaneously stifle any possibility of the rebirth of a new slavery; — at this moment, the mouthpieces of the ruling Left Bloc, guided by the crafty Lenin, furiously peddled the notion that Lenin's government controlled the Revolution and that everyone must submit to this government as the only repository of the people's secular desires — freedom, equality, and free labour.

The urge to dominate the people and their thoughts, and the great Russian Revolution which they had created, so befuddled the state socialists that they forgot for the moment their fundamental divergences on the Peace of Brest-Litovsk, a peace concluded with the German and Austro-Hungarian “tsars” which was regarded by the revolutionary population with hostility. This fundamental problem, with its stormy discussions, the state socialists neglected for the moment. Now another thorny problem had risen up before them. How, while remaining the originators and leaders of the Revolution in the eyes of the revolutionary masses, could they manage to distort the very essence of the concept of social revolution without being destroyed when their secret intentions were exposed? Their intentions were to divert the Revolution from the path of autonomous, creative action and subject it entirely to the statist doctrines following from the resolutions and directives of the Central Executive Committee and the government.

It was quite obvious that within the framework envisaged by the Left Bloc for the Great Russian Revolution there was no place either for autonomous agricultural communes or artels, organized freely on conquered territory without the approval of the government; or for the direct, independent take-over by the workers of factories, workshops, printing plants, and other public enterprises.

The direct actions of the toilers during the Great Russian Revolution clearly reflected their anarchist tendencies. And it was these tendencies which alarmed the state socialists of the Left the most, because the toilers of the cities and villages were pulling themselves together and preparing to launch an anarchist movement which would attack the very idea of the State, in order to recover the State's chief functions and turn them over to their own local autonomous organs.

By their direct revolutionary acts, the toilers showed great daring in their quest for self-liberation. Even if they were imperfectly organized, at least they acted tenaciously.

If the toilers of the cities and villages had received effective organizational assistance from revolutionary anarchists, they would have been able to achieve their aspirations and would draw all the active forces of the Revolution to their side. And this would have put an end to the irresponsible and incoherent actions of the new socialist rulers who, with Lenin, Ustinov and Co. in command, tried to impose itself on the mass of workers. And the abominable terror of the Bolsheviks, directed against humanity in general and against those who kept their personal convictions and were not afraid to criticize the Bolsheviks and their so-called "proletarian" government in particular, would not have existed in Russia or in Ukraine nor in the other Bolshevik republics.

Alas! We, the revolutionary anarchists, were never capable of seizing the initiative in the midst of great popular revolutionary actions, of understanding their significance and how to help them develop even further. And now we remained powerless, simply because of the lack of even the most rudimentary organization during the most decisive days of the Revolution.

The left-wing state-socialists, on the contrary, while they could not embrace completely the direct revolutionary actions of the toilers, at least quickly understood them and realized that, from the point of view of their ideology, it was impossible to support these popular actions because this would be the end of their illusions of power and would drag them down from the summits of the State which these new masters had attained by climbing on the backs of the direct defenders of the Revolution. The statist Bolsheviks and Left SRs hastened to move against these direct popular revolutionary actions. That is, they not only allowed the government of Lenin to restrain the revolutionary toilers of the cities and villages by decrees handed down from the top, but personally contributed to the disorganization of the toilers at the moment when they had succeeded for the first time in grouping their revolutionary forces effectively. These left-wing parties restrained the process of destruction, and thus the Revolution could not attain its ultimate phase in which the process of reconstruction could find its point of departure and acquire its full development. The new society opposes itself to all that was old and rotten in the former society and which is quite useless in a healthy human society. But always, in times of wholesale psychological changes in the population, the old system tends, under the most varied aspects and forms, hastily and superficially camouflaged, to find its place in the new, free social formations.

These left-wing state socialists, profiting from the naive trust of the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and other regions in their revolutionary work, abused this trust. With their notion of a socialist, proletarian state, they caused the people to swerve off the path of widening and intensifying the Revolution and brought disorganization into the nascent free society, distorting its individual and social tendencies and slowing down the process of its realization. It was this fact, and none other, which gave rise to weariness and indifference on the part of the partisans of liberation, while their enemies, regaining their composure, began to organize themselves and to act while taking into account the relative strengths of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces.

Such moments are advantageous for the new revolutionary forces because they can easily subdue the revolutionary toilers, this devoted vanguard of the Revolution, and separate them from the revolutionary front, broad and creative, which develops outside the control of the authorities. It is precisely under such conditions that the Ukrainian toilers were removed from the revolutionary front.

The politics of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors contributed in no small measure to this situation. It should be noted that the Left SRs protested vigorously against this treaty. But, being allied with the Bolsheviks in the business of deceiving and enslaving the toilers for the supposed purpose of constructing a new society in the name of the Revolution, the Left SRs submitted to a fait accompli. Along with the Bolsheviks, they withdrew all their Red Guard detachments from Ukraine in accord with the Treaty. Almost no resistance was offered to the counter-revolutionary forces of Germany and Austro-Hungarian or to the detachments of the Central Rada.

As for the revolutionary Ukrainian toilers, they were left, for the most part, totally at the mercy of the hangmen of the Revolution, invading from the west. The revolutionary commanders either took all the weapons with them, or abandoned them to the invaders.

It's true that the retreat of the revolutionary forces of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs went on for months. During this time, those commanders who had not yet been affected by the poison of these political parties did whatever they could to arm the revolutionary population of Ukraine. But the circumstances were quite unfavourable. The armies were retreating, which is why all the weapons could not be transferred to the revolutionary population and used by them against the advancing counter-revolutionary armies. The retreat of the Red Guards was transformed, indeed, into a veritable rout and the revolutionary territories abandoned were most often occupied the same day by the counter-revolutionary forces, so the revolutionary population had no time to organize themselves into combat units to repulse the invaders.

# **Chapter 28: The successes of the German-Austrian armies and the Ukrainian Central Rada against the Revolution; Agents of the Counter-Revolution and the struggle against them**

In March, 1918 the city of Kiev and most of Right Bank Ukraine was occupied by expeditionary armies of the imperial German and Austro-Hungarian empires. After reaching an agreement with the Central Rada, directed by Ukrainian socialists under the presidency of the ancient SR Professor M. Hrushevsky, these armies entered Ukrainian territory and began a vile attack against the Revolution.

With the direct assistance of the Central Rada and its agents, the German and Austro-Hungarian command extended a network of counter-revolutionary espionage over the whole Ukraine. While the expeditionary armies and the troops of the Central Rada were still on the right bank of the Dnepr, the Left Bank part of Ukraine was already infested with their numerous agents, spies, and provocateurs.

During this period, not a day passed in Gulyai-Pole itself, or in its raion, without some meeting where there was an attempt to induce the toilers to repudiate the Revolution for the benefit of the counter-revolution.

This infiltration by spies and provocateurs of the most revolutionary part of Ukraine, namely the Left Bank region, had the logical effect of uniting all the Ukrainian chauvinists of Gulyai-Pole into a “revolutionary” organization which labelled itself as “socialist-revolutionary”. At the head of this organization stood the agronomist Dmitrenko, P. Semenyuta-Riabko, A. Volokh, Volkov, and Prekhodko. These last four were lieutenants. Most of them were owners of large estates and one of them, Volkov, owned a dry goods store.

These landowner-lieutenants had long regarded the work of the Revolution with anger and spite, for it deprived them of their lands to the benefit of the community as a whole. However, they called themselves revolutionaries and under this phoney label they engaged in a struggle against the activities of the Revkom, the Soviet, and the Land Committee. When they had convinced themselves that the ideological inspiration behind these revolutionary entities, as well as the initiator of solutions to the agrarian and social-political questions for the whole raion, was the Anarchist Communist Group, they tried, first behind the scenes and then openly, to accuse anarchists generally and the Anarchist Communist Group in particular of being “thieves” and “bandits” who did not respect “either the laws of the Revolution or the limits which cannot be exceeded”.

These “revolutionaries” cited as an example other raions where the anarchists had not penetrated the ranks of the toilers and where the population did not try to resolve the land question without permission from the Provisional Government, up to the moment when the new government took over, “the government of Bolshevik-bandits”! — whined these ‘revolutionaries’.

“While here, in Gulyai-Pole, and in the neighbouring raions,” said these characters, “this question was resolved by brigandage starting in 1917. And all thanks to the anarchists.”

Such accusations against the anarchists by people covering themselves with the banner of socialism diminished only themselves and their ideas.

The Gulyai-Pole peasants had organizational connections with the anarchists that went back 11 years during most of which the anarchists had to live an underground existence. And during the past year the peasants had seen the anarchists openly in the vanguard of the Revolution and were convinced that the anarchists would always be on the right road with them. So the peasants hissed these newly minted “revolutionaries” when they gratuitously insulted the anarchist by comparing them with thieves and bandits.

As for the anarchists, they could only point out the work they had accomplished, along with the toilers, in the previous months including setting up the agrarian communes on the former properties of the pomeshchiks.

And the village toilers, recognizing that the anarchists were correct in their understanding of the meaning of the Revolution and of the rights of the toilers to liberate themselves entirely from all the bonds of slavery, continued to engage in revolutionary work themselves, despite all the traps set for them by their enemies.

Equality, freedom to think for yourself, and independence for each and everyone in Gulyai-Pole and its raion led to the following results: the workers acquired self-esteem and began to understand their place in life and in the struggle against their oppressors, whether from the Right or from the Left. This healthy course of the toilers to affirm their rights to liberty and independence worried the statist who, frightened at the idea of seeing their authoritarian principles go down the drain, began to take action against the toilers and spared none of the means at their disposal.

At the moment when the Ukrainian nationalist “revolutionary” organization of Gulyai-Pole unleashed their dirty campaign against the anarchists, the victorious advance of the counter-revolutionary German and Austro-Hungarian armies, preceded by detachments of the also counter-revolutionary Central Rada, had already crushed the Revolution in Right-Bank Ukraine. The Revolution there was rendered defenceless by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk concluded between the Bolshevik Party and the titular heads of these armies, Wilhelm of Germany and Karl of Austria-Hungary. I really don’t know if the Ukrainian socialist-chauvinists, who had agreed to an alliance with foreign tsars against the popular Revolution were even aware how odious their action was towards the Revolution. But their followers, the rank-in-file nationalists, certainly knew it because they clung to this shameful alliance and the armed support it provided them as a unique means to liberate Ukraine from the Revolution and re-establish the rule of the pomeshchiks.

Every day at their meetings the socialist “revolutionary” nationalists of Gulyai-Pole bragged that the counter-revolutionary armies of the Germans and Austro-Hungarians and the counter-revolutionary detachments of the Central Rada were smashing and crushing all the living forces of the Revolution as they advanced. Now the revolutionary toilers believed in freedom of speech and the inalienable right to have one’s own opinions, so the “revolutionary” socialists were not

restrained from spreading their odious propaganda. In fact they felt encouraged to organize a General Assembly of the toilers of Gulyai-Pole.

This Assembly promised to be most interesting. The organizers had posed the following question: who are the toilers of Gulyai-Pole who support the Central Rada [and consequently German and Austro-Hungarian militarists who were leading a 600,000 strong army against the Revolution], and who were the toilers who were against the Central Rada? And if against, under which banner did they march?

All the speakers competed in seeing how low they could stoop. They lied shamelessly. For “Mother Ukraine” and her independent government, her prisons, her jailers, and her executioners, everything must submit without resistance: the Revolution and liberty, and the toilers of the cities and villages who, advancing in the front line of the Revolution had adopted its best goals and worked to develop them.

“In the contrary case, in the case of resistance,” said the socialist-chauvinist orators, “we shall exterminate everything by force, assisted by our allies, by our brothers. [They meant Wilhelm II of Germany and Karl of Austria-Hungary with their armies.]

Those who do not resist the powerful armies of our allies will receive from the German command, through the intermediary of the Central Rada, sugar, cloth, and shoes from the thousands of trains which are following them.” [There was a great shortage of these items at that moment.]

But for those who resist, they will be no mercy! Entire villages and towns will be destroyed by fire; the populations will be lead into captivity and one prisoner in ten will be shot.

And the others? The others, for their treason, will receive a terrible punishment from their own Ukrainian brothers...”

Upon hearing these declarations, I spoke up and requested that all the speakers belonging to the Party which organized the meeting be prepared to back up their claims with verifiable data.

Next I addressed a few words to the citizens present on the statements presented by the speakers about the shameful alliance of the Central Rada with the emperors and drew some conclusions from what had been said by these speakers and by their opponents.

And the meeting concluded on a note of disapproval of the speakers and all the ideas they advanced before the mass of toilers present. A resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority calling on all the toilers to support active armed struggle against the Central Rada and the counter-revolutionary German and Austro-Hungarian armies.

This resolution did not satisfy the organizers of the meeting. They asked the assembly to be specific: under what banner would this struggle be led against the Central Rada and its allies who had “fraternally extended a hand to help save Ukraine”?

The assembly responded to their demand. It voted and, as a result, divided into three groups. One group threw their lot in with the organizers of the meeting, i.e. the Central Rada; another rallied around the Left SR Mirgorodsky; and the third remained loyal to the Anarchist Communist Group of Gulyai-Pole.

During the attempt to count the members of each group, Mirgorodsky’s bunch fused with the organizers of the meeting. It was hard to understand the role of the Left SR Mirgorodsky in this

situation. We tried to question his behaviour, but he couldn't come up with a satisfactory answer. He realized the error of his jesuitical manoeuvre only after the meeting.

Despite the fusion of the two groups, the supporters of the Central Rada still found themselves in an absolute minority. The resolution voted by the citizens present was ratified by them and there were further put-downs of the Central Rada and the foreign armies which were marching with it.

Then the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist organization — which called itself socialist-revolutionary — the sub-lieutenant Paul Semenyuta-Riabko, mounted the tribune and in a warlike voice announced to the toilers:

“Never mind! You’ll be sorry some day. But there won’t be forgiveness for all, especially not for the anarchists! The hour is fast approaching when our army will enter Gulyai-Pole. We’ll deal with you then. Remember, our allies, the Germans, are powerful! They will help us re-establish order in the country and you won’t be seeing any more anarchists around here!”

These hysterical utterings and threats roused the indignation of all the toilers. The anarchist peasants of Gulyai-Pole immediately spoke up and declared that they accepted the challenge of sub-lieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko. “But we ask,” said one of the anarchists, “that sub-lieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko give details about what’s going to happen when the Germans arrive in Gulyai-Pole.”

Then sub-lieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko provided those details: “The Germans will help the Central Rada impose its laws on the country and re-establish order which means that the anarchists will be imprisoned. You can preach your ideas in prison!” he cried, carried away with his anger.

In the audience some voices were raised: “Throw him out!” “Beat him up!”

The anarchists again delegated one of their members to declare to everyone present that it was now perfectly clear to them that the Ukrainian nationalist organization was counting on the arrival in Gulyai-Pole of the counter-revolutionary German armies. With the help of this brutal force, the nationalists were promising to “punish” the Revolution.

“No, not the Revolution, just the Bolsheviks and the anarchists,” replied a voice from the group of the Ukrainian nationalist SRs, standing around their leader, sub-lieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko.

“Very well! Then be aware, gentlemen nationalists, that we anarchists will respond to your vile challenge!” declared the secretary of the Anarchist Communist Group.

With these words the meeting came to an end. The toilers of Gulyai-Pole, outraged by the threats of Semenyuta-Riabko, went home angry and insulted.

The supporters of Semenyuta-Riabko surrounded him and, encouraged by their leader’s laughter, made nasty comments to the toilers who were leaving: “Go on home! We’re going to wait for the response of the anarchists...”

Three or four hours after the meeting I submitted officially to the Revkom on behalf of the Anarchist Communist Group the following question: “How does the Revkom, as the organizer of revolutionary unity and solidarity in the work of defending the Revolution, regard the threat addressed to the anarchists by the Ukrainian nationalist organization? Does the Revkom think it ought to do something about this threat, or not?”

The Revkom studied this question the very same day and responded to the Anarchist Communist Group that it placed no political importance on the threats of the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist “socialists”, sub-lieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko, directed at the anarchists. The organization of nationalists was in essence not revolutionary, and its vacuous and irresponsible chatter could do nothing to harm the work of the Revolution.

Nevertheless, the Anarchist Communist Group did not agree with the Revkom’s position regarding the clearly counter-revolutionary threats of the nationalists and declared a second time, in a note addressed to the Revkom, that it was a mistake to tolerate opinions contrary to the principles of revolutionary solidarity. The note demanded that the Revkom publish an appeal to the population, condemning in no uncertain terms the counter-revolutionary organization of the nationalist-socialists and their threats against the anarchists and the anarchist ideal specifically.

The Anarchist Communist Group declared if the Revkom did not act in this matter, it would be obliged to recall its members from the Revkom and could no longer support it in any fashion in the future.

As I recall, several members of the Revkom asked me if I agreed with the demands of the Group and if I would submit to its decision if it recalled its members from the Revkom. I responded that the demands of the Anarchist Communist Group were justified and that, although I was not a delegate from the Group but rather from the Soviet, I intended to respect the decision of the Group and act accordingly. Then the members of the Revkom decided unanimously, without discussion, to review the two notes of the Anarchist Communist Group again and summon the leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist organization to try to smooth over the conflict which had arisen between them and the anarchists.

But it was already too late...

The Anarchist Communist Group made the Revkom aware that it had declared terror against all those who dared, now or in the future (in the case of victory of the Counter-Revolution over the Revolution), to persecute the anarchist ideal or its anonymous adherents. The first act in this campaign was the execution of Semenyuta-Riabko, an act which had already been carried out by members of the Group.

Actually, Semenyuta-Riabko had been killed around the same time the Anarchist Communist Group made its declaration to the Revkom. The Group had not received a timely answer from the Revkom to their second note and took matters into its own hands. The news of this execution made a very strong impression on the Revkom. Its members were shook up — they could neither act nor speak and appeared completely stunned as the representatives of the Group calmly dealt with current business.

The next day, around 10 a.m., a delegation from the organization of Ukrainian nationalists arrived at the Revkom and consulted with me, requesting my intervention in the conflict between their Ukrainian Organization (UO) (they didn’t call themselves nationalists) and the Anarchist Communist Group.

When I passed this information on to the members of the Revkom, they totally refused to examine this affair, declaring that Semenyuta-Riabko, dazzled by the success of the counter-revolutionary Austro-German armies, lost his senses which prevented him from understanding that the Revolution was not yet beaten and was still capable of striking back at its enemies.

Threatening the anarchists with the arrival of counter-revolutionary troops and prison was a flagrant act of injustice towards the Revolution, the Revolution which almost the entire population supported. The killing of the person who made this threat and boasted of a Counter-

Revolution supported by the bayonets of the emperors' armies and the Central Rada, was an act in defence of the Revolution.

But it came too late. The anarchists should have killed him the moment this counter-revolutionary had threatened them in saying that as soon as his German and Austro-Hungarian friends showed up, he would make it his business to see that the anarchists were locked up.

“Since the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist organization was an enemy of the Revolution,” declared the members of the Revkom, “we consider it quite inadmissible to concern ourselves with this incident and to have it mentioned in the minutes of our meetings.

With the knowledge and approval of his organization, sub-lieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko uttered a vicious threat against the anarchists; it thus belongs to this organization to straighten out this matter, to withdraw the threat and carefully redefine its socio-political position with regard to the Revolution. Only then can the UO be admitted to the Revkom and avoid similar conflicts in the future.”

The delegation left the Revkom and returned to its comrades, bearing the censure of the Revkom against the whole UO.

I must say that personally I did not approve of this response, but I couldn't protest while the delegation was present. Only after it had left did I affirm once more that the Revkom stood for revolutionary unity and solidarity. As such it should be prepared to enter into negotiations with organizations which requested its intervention in cases where errors of judgement had occurred, errors which could provoke conflicts like the one created by the UO which had led to the death of its leader.

Already when the Anarchist Communist Group first approached the Revkom about the threat against the anarchists, I had said that it was necessary to intervene in this conflict. But the majority of members of the Revkom had objected, claiming that if the Revkom stayed out it the whole thing would blow over and be forgotten.

Now I repeated again: if the Revkom had reacted right away to my desire to maintain the revolutionary honour of the Group of which I was a member, the Group which had close ideological ties with the Revkom in the defence and development of the Revolution, it is entirely possible that the Group would not have killed the agent of the counter-revolutionary Central Rada.

“It's true that it's too late to do anything now,” I said to my comrades on the Revkom, “but it's not too late to act to avoid retaliatory assassinations on the part of the nationalists which — I must declare it openly — will unleash terror against all those who — consciously or just through stupidity — have become agents of the dirty work of the Central Rada and its German allies.”

At this same meeting, the Revkom designated three of its members: Moise Kalinichenko, Paul Sokruta, and myself, who were to form a commission with the nationalists to find a way to avoid killings by either side.

Representing the chauvinists on the commission was a certain Dmitrenko, a convinced SR, who was president of the Prosvita organization.

The Anarchist Communist Group was represented by its secretary, A. Kalashnikov.

After some discussion, it appeared that the Ukrainian Organization disassociated itself entirely from the threat addressed by Semenyuta-Riabko to the anarchists.

The representative of the UO, Dmitrenko, declared that Semenyuta-Riabko's threat could be explained by his boundless enthusiasm and empathy for the suffering of his people. The UO disapproved of this threat and considered it in contradiction with its ideas.

But Dmitrenko was not sincere. His declaration was only a political manoeuvre on the part of the UO.

We understood this, and Comrade Kalashnikov replied that "We see in this threat the desire of the whole UO to attack the anarchists for their tenacious struggle against the invasion of revolutionary territory by the counter-revolutionary armies of the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors and the troops of the Central Rada."

"The Anarchist Communist Group believed it had a duty to kill the instigator of this enterprise directed against the anarchists and against their ideas. The Group killed him and is prepared in the future to kill any scoundrels like him."

After this I went to a meeting of the Anarchist Communist Group where I asked the comrades to renounce terror, but my view was attacked by a whole bunch of them. They viewed my appeal as a defence of the agents of the Counter-Revolution and they scoffed at me, not holding anything back.

I found their audacity irritating, but I was also glad to see that I didn't intimidate them and began to feel more strongly that my work among the younger members of the Group had not been in vain.

In spite of the ridicule, my considerations for and against terror were ultimately adopted by the Group as the basis on which to review its declaration of terror and, after a series of meetings and serious discussions among the comrades, the Group renounced its previous resolution and recorded in the minutes that so long as the enemies of the Revolution restricted themselves to verbal attacks without taking up arms, terrorist acts would not be applied against them.

The younger members of the Group had a lot of trouble understanding this decision and more than once they suggested that "Comrade Makhno wants to convert the most hidebound counter-revolutionaries into revolutionaries. Comrade Makhno has thereby delivered a heavy blow to the unity of the Group", etc.

However the moment was such that no one wanted to desert the Group. For it was the moment when the Counter-Revolution, borne on the bayonets of the German armies, clearly had the upper hand over the defenders of the Revolution which consisted of a few isolated units of Red Guards. Consequently, for a raion like Gulyai-Pole which could mobilize significant forces for the defense of the Revolution, we needed to pursue a different set of tactics. We needed to push strongly for peace between the different parties, for equality and toleration of different revolutionary opinions, because Gulyai-Pole was becoming the centre of the spiritual and military forces which could save the Revolution.

That's why I didn't pay much attention to the naive protests of my young friends. I was confronted with the huge problem of organizing battalions of volunteers to fight the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, 600,00 strong.

I felt that the Revkom had been negligent in this area of its work and insisted that all the detachments in the raion which were under the control of the Revkom should be organized as battalions with a complement of 1,500 soldiers each.

The Anarchist Communist Group, in my opinion, had to set an example in this domain just as it had in its other revolutionary work. Otherwise it would trail behind the revolutionary events. It would separate itself from the toilers of the oppressed villages and would be reduced to the

level of hundreds of other anarchist groups in Russia which had no influence on the ideas which guided the masses of toilers who had faith in the Revolution but were not able on their own to define its essential core and defend it from the distortions of the chiefs of political socialism.

The Group took this circumstance into consideration and showed militant qualities of the first order in organizing armed forces for the defence of the Revolution.

Other groups in the cities and villages of other raions wasted time in fruitless discussions, along the lines of: "Is it really anarchist for an anarchist group to create revolutionary combat units? Would it not be preferable for such groups to distance themselves from such activity, contenting themselves with not preventing their members from participating in this 'semi-anarchist' work?"

The peasant Anarchist Communist Group of Gulyai-Pole advanced the following credo:

"Revolutionary toilers, form battalions of volunteers to save the Revolution! The state socialists have betrayed the Revolution in Ukraine and are leading the black forces of reaction from foreign countries! In order to counter this attack an immense force of revolutionary toilers is necessary. The revolutionary toilers will find the necessary strength by forming these battalions of volunteers and will triumph over the intrigues of their enemies, both of the right and of the left!"

The Revkom and all the soviets of the raion took up this credo and promoted it actively.

There were, to be sure, especially among the tribe of Ukrainian nationalists, individuals who opposed this credo. But the discussions on this question were conducted in a more civilized fashion. There were no references to the bayonets of the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary armies and no threats of reprisals against the opponents of the criminal politics of the Central Rada. Now even the nationalists seemed to realize that the politics of the Central Rada was directed against the Ukrainian working people and their revolutionary conquests. The Ukrainian toilers were asserting themselves ever more freely and clearly in overcoming the most formidable obstacles raised against them by their enemies on the path of Revolution. These enemies were: on the Right — the bourgeoisie; on the Left — the state socialists who sought to take advantage of the situation to give a false interpretation of the goals of the Revolution and thereby subjugate the Revolution entirely to the needs of the state.

It was a very heavy situation. All of us, members of the Anarchist Communist Group and the revolutionary peasant worker organizations, felt it. And then a scandal broke out which involved the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers. The executive of this union demanded that the Anarchist Communist Group and the Soviet recall Comrade Lev Schneider from the Provincial Soviet.

This demand was motivated by the fact that Comrade Schneider had not fulfilled his mandate; consequently, the factories and mills of Gulyai-Pole, as well as the blacksmith shops, locksmith shops, and other workshops were receiving little or no iron, steel, coal, and other raw materials which they required.

Confronted with this criticism of its responsible representative, the Anarchist Communist Group, after conferring with the Soviet, recalled Lev Schneider to Gulyai-Pole so that he could explain the reasons which prevented him from fulfilling his mandate.

But, Comrade Schneider had already contracted the disease of carelessness and irresponsibility which infected certain of our anarchist comrades in the cities. He responded that he couldn't

return to Gulyai-Pole as he was too burdened, so he said, with tasks assigned to him by the Provincial Soviet. He invited the Anarchist Communist Group to nominate another representative in his place.

Such an attitude towards the organizing the toilers of the whole raion on the part of a member of the Anarchist Communist Group and someone who was respected by the toilers, incited the Group to send him an urgent telegram demanding his immediate return to Gulyai-Pole, where he would have to answer to the Anarchist Communist Group, the Soviet, and the Trade Union. If he refused to come, the Group would be obliged to send two comrades to fetch him.

Comrade Schneider knew that this was not an idle threat and that the Anarchist Communist Group would shortly track him down and arrest him for having compromised the Group before the Soviet and the Trade Union and, consequently, before all the toilers. He could very well end up being shot.

Two days after receiving this terse telegram, Comrade Schneider turned up in Gulyai-Pole and made his report to the Soviet and to the Group. His mandate was withdrawn and Comrade Schneider went back to the Kerner factory to run his lathe again.

While the Group was occupied with sorting out this case, the agents of the Central Rada and their German allies were not losing any time. They seized on the case of Lev Schneider and harped on it at meetings of the toilers.

It was necessary to fight stubbornly against the slanders. We had to go to all the villages and hamlets and be present at all the meetings organized by the agents of the Rada or of General Eichorn. This took up a lot of our time and kept some of our best comrades from the most pressing working of our Group — the creation of an armed front against the Counter-Revolution.

## Chapter 29: Consolidation of the detachments; formation of a single Front with the Left Bloc

Things were happening fast. The German and Austro-Hungarian armies, led by General Eichorn, were already approaching Ekaterinoslav; from another direction shells were fired on Aleksandrovsk from near the Kichkass Bridge, about 80 kilometres from Gulyai-Pole.

Opposing them were the Red Guard detachments commanded by General Egorov as well as numerous independent detachments which received weapons and ammunition from Egorov and the chief of the reserve Red Army of the “South of Russia” Belenkevich. These autonomous units acted at their own risk and peril — most often in sectors where there were no enemies. These forces were recalled urgently from Crimea to the region of Verkhnj Tokmak and Pologi. But there was no longer any question of disembarking these troops from their echelons. They had been withdrawn from the Front too soon, which had clearly influenced their fighting spirit. They now talked only of getting as far as possible from the Front, to branch stations such as Yasnovataya or Ilovajsk. In reality, two days later these forces were pushed forward to meet the enemy forces which, incidentally, were still on the right bank of the Dnepr.

Some of the independent detachments and a group of Left Bloc soldiers heroically repulsed the attempts of the enemy to cross the Dnepr. But there was considerable attrition in the defending forces due to exhaustion and a shortage of ammunition. This gave rise to increasing anxiety in Gulyai-Pole and the neighbouring raions.

The agents of the Counter-Revolution raised their heads a little higher and spoke more confidently against the Soviets, against the Revolution, and against the toilers who saw in the Revolution their own emancipation and therefore put everything into furthering its development.

This circumstance had a dolorous effect on the toilers. In numerous hamlets and villages confusion reigned as it always does when the masses are not kept informed in a timely fashion about the position occupied by their revolutionary vanguard.

The confusion which reigned in the raion gave rise to weakness and hesitation even in Gulyai-Pole. Meetings of the Soviet, the Professional Union, the Revkom, and the Anarchist Communist Group went on night and day. All the representatives of these organizations asked me for advice and insisted that I tell them what they should do.

In this grave situation I could only tell them to pull themselves together and oppose the Counter-Revolution with actions which were as energetic and resolute as their words.

I insisted to the representatives at an emergency meeting on the necessity of immediately issuing an appeal in the name of the various organizations which they represented, explaining to the toilers of the raion the real state of the Revolution and what they had to do to save it. It would invite the toilers to organize armed resistance against the phoney liberation promised by the Central Rada and the German armies.

The whole population of the raion responded to this appeal. Everywhere young people and seniors flocked to their local soviets in order to enlist and immediately form volunteer battalions. The inhabitants of Gulyai-Pole itself formed a battalion comprised of six companies with 200 to 220 persons each.

The Jewish population furnished a company also as part of the Gulyai-Pole battalion. The Anarchist Communist Group formed a detachment from its members and candidate members. This detachment was composed of several hundred persons armed with rifles, revolvers, and sabres. About half of them had horses and saddles. This detachment was put at the disposition of the Revkom.

The intelligentsia of Gulyai-Pole, on the initiative of the very well-respected doctor Abram Isaakovich Los, organized medical units, improvised field hospitals, and handed out job assignments for the medical service required by the Revolutionary Front.

Meanwhile I went to Pologi for a day to the headquarters of the commander of the reserve Red Army of the "South of Russia" Belenkevich. I informed him of the current goals of the Gulyai-Pole Revkom and brought him up to date on our organization in defence of the Revolution which was the number one priority of the Revkom and the Anarchist Communist Group.

Comrade Belenkevich showed great interest in what I told him and promised to go to Gulyai-Pole the next day to see what he could do to help the Revkom and the Anarchist Communist Group. But I wasn't satisfied with this promise. I insisted that Comrade Belenkevich give me his answer immediately: could he supply weapons to the volunteers in Gulyai-Pole?

Seeing my impatience to resolve this question as quickly as possible, Comrade Belenkevich returned with me that very day to Gulyai-Pole.

He was thus able to verify what I had told him and promised the Revkom that as soon as he got back to Pologi he would confer with his staff and let us know what the reserve Red Army could do to help revolutionary Gulyai-Pole.

In returning from Gulyai-Pole to Pologi I got Comrade Belenkevich to visit Commune No.1 and led him to the fields where the free "communards" were working. He watched them work, asked them why they had adopted this way of life, and was profoundly moved.

In walking from the fields to the dining hall of the commune for the evening meal, Belenkevich shook my hand and said: "I felt, from the moment I first met you, great confidence in you, Comrade Makhno, and I say to you right now: send your people this very night to my headquarters and they will receive the rifles, machine guns, and other weapons needed by your battalion in Gulyai-Pole."

This promise by Comrade Belenkevich pleased me and I immediately phoned Comrade Polonski, commander of the battalion of volunteers of Gulyai-Pole, and Comrade Marchenko, member of the Revkom, and told them to go to Pologi and get the weapons and ammunition from Belenkevich's headquarters and transport them to Gulyai-Pole.

As we parted, Comrade Belenkevich and I promised to help each other in revolutionary endeavours. He promised, in the case of retreat, to make available to the "communards" some echelons so they could be evacuated in time.

So passed these troubled days...

On the next day I went with several artillery specialists to the Gulyai-Pole railway station to inspect what we had received from Belenkevich's headquarters. We saw six cannons (four of the French kind and two Russian howitzers), three thousand rifles, two wagons of cartridges, and nine wagons of ammunition for the cannons.

Our joy was indescribable. We immediately transported what was urgently needed to the Revkom for distribution to the companies. Then we prepared to leave for the front to fight the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors.

The appeal launched by the Revkom of Gulyai-Pole, the Soviet, and the Anarchist Communist Group, inviting the toilers of the raion to quickly form battalions of volunteers to fight the counter-revolutionaries, came to the attention of the headquarters of the Red Guards who immediately sent by special train an envoy to meet with me and find out what forces the Revkom of our proud raion could muster and when these troops, inspired by anarchist ideals, could be sent to the front.

I met with him on the night of April 8, 1918, at the same moment when Lenin and Trotsky were having a discussion in the Kremlin about annihilating the anarchists groups, first in Moscow, then in the whole of Russia (they had already lost interest in Ukraine and so didn't touch the anarchists there). I found the envoy from the Red Guard headquarters in Ekaterinoslav was distressed by the fact that the Red Guard detachments, in accord with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, were being withdrawn from the front lines of the revolutionary front in the direction of the Russian border, while the detachments made up of Ukrainian toilers, hastily organized, were not yet ready for combat and were falling back everywhere. I assured him that I would do everything possible to ensure that our troops would be advancing on the morrow to the Front.

After this envoy had left, I received news that the Red Guards had also retreated in the Aleksandrovsk sector. The military command in Aleksandrovsk implored the Gulyai-Pole battalions to come to their aid. After consulting with the Revkom and the Anarchist Communist Group, I sent to Aleksandrovsk the detachment formed by the Anarchist Communist Group and a mixed battalion formed from the peasants of hamlets closest to Aleksandrovsk.

The detachment formed by the Anarchist Communist Group was a cavalry formation. The Red Guards had almost no cavalry. Our detachment was soon required in the Ekaterinoslav military sector. In due course it was also redeployed, on my orders, in the Chaplino sector. Meanwhile we successfully prepared the Gulyai-Pole, Konsko-Pazdorskij, Shanzharo-Turkenovskij, and other "free battalions" for action at the front.

## Chapter 30: Egorov's urgent summons; the loss of our military sector

It was a very tense moment. The Ukrainian nationalist organization seemed to be moribund. Its members didn't say anything, they mostly just did what they were asked to do.

The artillery and infantry were tuned up. We intended to advance but didn't have panoramic sights for our cannon. We sent a telegram to Belenkevich: could he not provide us with new panoramic sights? We didn't get an answer. At night Ukrainian SRs — the agronomist Dmitrenko and two youths — the fanatical nationalists P. Kovalenko and Mikita Konoplya — cut all the telegraph and telephone wires outside of Gulyai-Pole. This deprived me of connections with the staff of the Red Army command. I made sure all the peasants were informed about this evil deed. After a few hours connections were re-established. I got word from Belenkevich that the panoramic sights and spare parts for the cannons and machine guns should be found in certain boxes in a certain railway car. Everything turned up and was distributed where needed.

In the meantime proclamations of the Ukrainian socialists-nationalists appeared in Gulyai-Pole and throughout the raion explaining the alliance of the Central Rada with their German "brothers" who were helping the sons of Ukraine "liberate the Ukraine from the yoke of the katzaps". This proclamation concluded with an appeal to the population to help the Central Rada and its German and Austro-Hungarian brothers finish off the enemy....

At the same time a rumour was spreading among the inhabitants of Gulyai-Pole to the effect that the German troops were destroying all the towns and villages in their path which offered resistance to them and the Central Rada. And, on the other hand, those citizens who co-operated with them were provided with all the necessities, including sugar, footwear, and textiles.

More and more often and loudly began to be heard among the population outbursts such as: "— and what if the Germans burn villages?... Then they will burn Gulyai-Pole!... What will happen to our children, our parents?!... ." And then one the agents of the Central Rada blurted out the word "delegation" which was quickly seized upon and repeated from one person to the next among the toilers of Gulyai-Pole.

This word attracted my attention. I called a meeting of the Revkom, the Soviet, and the A-K Group and proposed to publish an appeal headed by the following lines: "The soul of the traitor and the conscience of the tyrant are as black as the night in springtime". I also wanted to organize a meeting to explain to the whole population of Gulyai-Pole the provocative meaning of the term "delegation", etc.

At that very moment I learned that several supporters of the Central Rada had just arrived in Gulyai-Pole and were trying to convince the population that they had been made prisoners by the Bolsheviks while returning from the External Front but had succeeded in escaping. I also learned that under the direction of the father of one of these so-called escapees, Tikhon Byk, a delegation was being prepared to treat with the German command.

I therefore asked the comrades to organize the meeting as quickly as possible and went looking for Tikhon Byk. When I found him, I demanded an explanation of this "delegation". He offered denials for a long time, but when he realized this was useless, he told me not to involve myself in this question: "It's the people's business." I left him in peace, declaring that for such an action the people themselves would wring his neck and do the same to all those who tried to defend him.

The appeal was published and the meeting convened, a meeting at which everyone agreed on the necessity of an immediate departure for the front. During the meeting I received a telegram from the commander of a Red Guard detachment, Egorov, summoning me urgently to his headquarters on the Verkhnj-Tokmak — Fedorovka railway line.

I had to make a hurried trip to Commune #1, of which I was a member. I had received a report that about ten drunken sailors had arrived there from the headquarters of the Red Army reserve forces. They had shot one of the members of the Commune. It was necessary to get them out of there without more bloodshed. I succeeded in convincing the sailors to leave. Then I went to the station of Pologi and took the train for Egorov's headquarters.

Half way there I learned that he had withdrawn in the direction of Uzovo, so I travelled on the branch line Verkhnj-Tokmak — Tsarevokonstantinovka. At Tsarevokonstantinovka I met Belenkevich and his reserve armies which had retreated from Pologi. They had also lost touch with Egorov's headquarters. They didn't expect to re-establish a connection until nightfall. I was worried about not having caught up with Egorov by now. And the knowledge that I needed to be in Gulyai-Pole on the morning of April 16, no matter what, increased my anxiety.

I had just decided not to spend any more time looking for Egorov and return to Gulyai-Pole when Comrade Belenkevich said to me: "If Comrade Egorov summoned you, you must try to see him before leaving for the front. He has probably decided not to send your battalion to Chaplino because this sector had already been evacuated by us."

This news stunned me! I decided to wait for nightfall when Comrade Belenkevich had re-established contact with Egorov's headquarters.

Around 9 p.m. I sent a telephone message to both the headquarters in Gulyai-Pole and the Revkom, warning them that I had been delayed for an indefinite period.

At midnight I received from Pologi, by way of Tsarekonstantinovka, news that Gulyai-Pole had been traitorously surrendered to the Germans and the troops of the Central Rada.

I didn't believe this incredible news which bore no signature. However, at 1 a.m. I telephoned Pologi station and asked if they had sent the telephone message at midnight. The operator told me: "Yes, two young men with weapons came in and one of them sent the message you have received. He refused to provide a signature."

I tried to contact Gulyai-Pole, but I was told that Gulyai-Pole is not answering.

Just as I was getting ready to leave for Gulyai-Pole I received news that Egorov's headquarters was at Volnovakha, about 45 or 50 kilometres from Tsarevokonstantinovka. I decided to go there, but, when I arrived, I learned the Egorov had already left for Dolya. I telegraphed: "Will Egorov's headquarters stay long at Dolya?" and received the reply that it had already left for Taganrog.

I left the telegraph office and headed for the locomotive. At this moment Belenkevich's echelon arrived at the station. Who should jump down from the train but my nephew Foma (son of my oldest brother) who, looking distraught, handed me a letter.

I tore open the envelope and read what follows, which was already out of date:

"Nestor Ivanovich: no sooner had you left Gulyai-Pole than Tikhon Bik also left with some of the nationalists. Two stories circulated here: one said that they were going to follow you and treacherously kill you.... So be very careful during your return trip, especially at Pologi station.... The second said that T. Bik left with a secret delegation from Gulyai-Pole to the German forces. Immediately after he left, I sent two of our friends to his home. His wife said that he had gone to visit relatives for two days.... I have just learned, while writing these lines, that some kind of delegation from the Central Rada and the German armies has arrived in Gulyai-Pole. But it is hidden for the moment and not showing itself to the population. I have taken all measures to arrest this delegation... but am not sure of success. Please return quickly; without your presence we are all sad and depressed.... — signed: Your faithful B. Veretel'nik. April 15, 1918.

I began to question my nephew about Gulyai-Pole but my voice trembled and I was overcome with nervous exhaustion. Closing my eyes, I collapsed on a bench, motioning to my nephew that I couldn't listen to him.... A few minutes later I sat in my railway car and left for Tsarevokonstantinovka — Pologi — Gulyai-Pole.

As a result of the retreat of the echelons of the Red Guards, I was held up three or four hours between Volnovakha and Tsarevokonstantinovka. Arriving at Tsarevokonstantinovka, I received more news from Gulyai-Pole, more worrisome still. I read:

"My dear Nestor Ivanovich. During the night of April 16, on a counterfeit order supposedly signed by you, the anarchist detachment was recalled from Chaplino and disarmed en route. All our comrades from Gulyai-Pole, all the members of the Revkom and the Soviet have been arrested and expect to be turned over to the German military and Central Rada authorities to be executed. This treason was directed by the nationalists A. Volokh, I. Volkov, Osip Solovej, commander of artillery V. Sharovskij, and others. Three hours before we were arrested, the Jewish or Central Company was assigned garrison duty. The miserable traitors deceived the Jews and forced them to carry out their vile scheme.

At the time of our arrest we were all disarmed and beaten with blows from rifle butts. Some of our guys who were still armed fired on the enemy.

They say the bourgeoisie is gloating.

Our friend Aleksis Marchenko was apprehended by the leaders of the traitors but he succeeded in escaping. A group of young Jews was sent to find him. Marchenko responded with a few shots, threw two or three grenades, and disappeared. But he was captured about 15 kilometres from Gulyai-Pole by Jews from the Mezhirichi colony, taken to Gulyai-Pole, and handed over to the headquarters of the traitors.

They say that the mood of the peasants is downcast. There is hatred towards the Jews for their behaviour.

I am transmitting this letter to you through the sentinel Sh., indicating through whom he can get it to you. If you receive it, come quickly with some kind of force to rescue us.

Your faithful B. Veretel'nik.

16 April. 9 a.m."

While I read this letter from Comrade Veretel'nik, the detachment of Maria Nikiforova arrived at Tsarevokonstantinovka station. I informed her of the events which had just unfolded in Gulyai-Pole. She immediately telephoned the commander of a detachment of Red Guards, a certain sailor Polupanov who was currently engaged in combat with "White Guards" in Mariupol'. Maria Nikiforova proposed that he return to Tsarevokonstantinovka in order to launch an attack against Gulyai-Pole with her.

The sailor Polupanov replied that he couldn't go back that way and advised Nikiforova to evacuate the Tsarevokonstantinovka — Pologi area before the Germans cut off her retreat.

While this was going on, the detachment of the sailor Stepanov arrived in Tsarevokonstantinovka and, shortly after, the Siberian detachment of Petrenko, composed of two echelons of cavalry and infantry.

Nikiforova asked Stepanov to return with her to Pologi and from there, with the protection of two armoured cars, move on Gulyai-Pole. Stepanov declared that he had attached to his echelon several wagons of fugitives which he was delivering to Comrade Belenkevich. Then he intended to go on to Taganrog. Indeed, he left immediately.

Nikiforova and Petrenko (the commander of the Siberian detachment) decided to return to Pologi and occupy Gulyai-Pole by force in order to free all the anarchists and other revolutionaries being held there. They also intended to gather up the revolutionary armed forces which had been deceived and help them evacuate Gulyai-Pole, or, at any rate, to collect any weapons which might otherwise fall into the hands of the Germans.

While the detachments were preparing to leave, I paced up and down the platform, tearing out my hair and regretting bitterly that I had not sent the detachment formed by the A-K Group from Gulyai-Pole to the Front. Then I received a third letter from Comrade Veretel'nik:

"My dear friend Nestor Ivanovich, the infamous leaders of the treason, terrified by I know not what, have freed me as well as Comrade Gorev on condition, however, that we leave Gulyai-Pole.

Comrade Gorev and I have profited from this circumstance to organize in each sotnia a meeting with the participation of the older peasants. At these meetings, the peasants voted for resolutions demanding the immediate release of everyone arrested, especially the anarchists, and sent these resolutions to the headquarters of the traitors. All our comrades were freed.

Many of the young Jewish workers, and all of the bourgeoisie, with the exception of M. E. Helbuch and Levy, have run off somewhere for fear of vengeance. However no one here has laid a hand on them because all our comrades understand quite well that the leaders of the treason involved them in their scheme in order to set them up for a pogrom.

The Germans are approaching Gulyai-Pole. Our comrades are hiding in groups. The peasants are concealing the rifles, machine guns, and ammunition and are dispersing, some to the fields, some to the neighbouring villages.

Some of my friends and myself plan to remain in Gulyai-Pole up to the last minute. Perhaps we shall succeed in killing Lev Shneider. At the moment our comrades were arrested at the office of the A-K Group, he was the first to enter with the haidamaks. He ripped up our banner and tore up and trampled on the portraits of Kropotkin, Bakunin, and Sasha Semenyuta. This vile act was witnessed by numerous workers and peasants.

I myself have not seen Lev Shneider, but I've heard from a number of sources that he has been blabbing away to the haidamaks. We'll talk about him later. Be careful not to fall into the paws of the Germans. It's better if you don't come to Gulyai-Pole. You can't do anything more for us now: the Germans have occupied Orekhov and Pokrovskoe, and they will probably be in Gulyai-Pole in two or three hours.

We will find you.

For the time being, we careful.

Your faithful B. Veretel'nik

April 16, 3 p.m."

As soon as I finished reading this letter I hurried to Maria Nikiforova and together we ran to Comrade Petrenko. I read both of them the letter of Veretel'nik and told them that it was my opinion that it was too late to go to Gulyai-Pole which must already be occupied by the Germans. As for driving them out of Gulyai-Pole, it was unthinkable with only our two detachments. Moreover, the Germans would be able to prevent us from getting anywhere close to Gulyai-Pole.

If it was true they had occupied the city of Orekhov, it was then probable they were approaching Pologi. And if it was true the Red Guards had abandoned Chaplino to the Germans and evacuated Grishino, then Gulyai-Pole was already well behind the German front.

Whereas Comrades Nikiforova and Petrenko had begun by putting me down, saying I understood nothing of their strategy and didn't appreciate the combat resources of their detachments, they now hastened to turn their echelons from the Pologi direction to the direction of Volnovakha. They stopped talking about Pologi and Gulyai-Pole.

I asked them: "Why are you in such a hurry? Have you received some bad news about this sector?" M. Nikiforova replied that the Germans had occupied the stations of Pologui and Verkhnij-Tokmak and that they had thereby cut off the anarchist detachment of Comrade Mokrousov on the Verkhnij-Tokmak — Berdyansk line.

"If you wish," said M. Nikiforova, "you can sit in my wagon. I am going to give the order to my echelon to continue on in the direction of Volnovakha — Yuzovka." And she added softly, with a slight smile, excusing herself: "You were totally right to say it was too late to go to Gulyai-Pole. All the approaches are occupied by the Germans."

However I declined to retreat with M. Nikiforova's detachment, declaring I would remain there for the time being, especially since Petrenko's detachment had decided to spend the night there. I was hoping that some of my comrades from Gulyai-Pole would show up. I had, indeed, upon first learning that Gulyai-Pole had been betrayed to the Germans, sent Aleksandr Lepetchenko there with the mission of explaining to the "communards" the direction they must take in their flight and recommended that he accompany them. As for Comrades

Veretel'nik, Gorev, Marchenko, Polonskij, Kalashnikov, Petrovskij, Lyutyi, Savva Makhno, S. Shepel, M. Kalinichenko, P. Sokruta, and others, Aleksandr Lepetchenko was to tell them to leave Gulyai-Pole as quickly as possible and head for the Red Front. There they would find me.

During the time that Petrenko's detachment was at the Tsarevokonstantinovka station, I was able to greet a number of comrades who had remained at Gulyai-Pole up until the arrival of the German and Austro-Hungarian forces, preceded by a reconnaissance squadron of the Central Rada about 40 — 50 strong. They told me the story of everything that had happened in Gulyai-Pole in the two days following my departure. They had tears in their eyes as they told me about the foul treason of Lev Schneider, a comrade of our Group, and of the Jewish regiment tricked by the gang of traitors.

They also told me about the entry of the German and Austro-Hungarian forces and the detachment of the Central Rada. They told about the local agents of the Central Rada, citizens of Gulyai-Pole, in particular sub-lieutenants A. Volokh, I. Volkov, L. Sakhno-Prikhod'ko (SR), Pidjima, and some others — small fry but vicious — such as Osip Solovej, V. Sharovskij (SR), and the agronomist Dmitrenko. This bunch prepared themselves to receive the hangmen of the Revolution — the Germans and Austro-Hungarians — hoping to prove that they were also killers of the Revolution and all that was best in it.

This crème-de-la-crème of the Ukrainian patriots, the so-called “flower of our people”, were ready to follow the example of the German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers who, leaving their own countries to suffer from hunger and cold, leaving their fathers and mothers, their wives and children, had come here to kill their counterparts. The nationalists, not content with supporting these conscious or unconscious assassins, these destroyers of the people's revolutionary achievements, wanted to do worse things. They were ready to march at the head of these murderers and arsonists, fight the toilers, and drown them in blood. And all so that their masters, who had traitorously covered themselves with the flag of socialism, would let them keep their gold epaulets as sub-lieutenants and their right to own the land.

These proclaimers of the idea of the occupation of revolutionary territory by the counter-revolutionary German and Austro-Hungarian armies, and the subsequent annihilation of the revolutionary toilers, handed over to the foreign troops as they passed through Gulyai-Pole machine guns, hundreds of rifles, and our cannons!

The commander of the German forces thanked them for their “loyalty”. These odious proclaimers of the idea of occupation, along with others who were in tune with the new counter-revolutionary regime, did not conceal their joy at this compliment from the powerful.

What a disgrace!

And so a desire for vengeance was born in the soil of the revolutionaries. Vengeance against all those who trampled on the toiling population, enslaved, tortured, crushed politically and socially.

No more pity for the enemies of the toilers! No more pity for all those who try to oppose our revolutionary activity! That's what I told my comrades then and that's how I acted.

The reader will see how this worked out in the next volumes of my memoirs.

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# The Manifesto of The Makhnovists

Nestor Makhno

1918

Victory or death. This is what confronts the peasants of the Ukraine at the present moment in history. But we shall not all perish. There are too many of us. We are humanity. So we must win — win not so that we may follow the example of past years and hand over our fate to some new master, but to take it in our own hands and conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of truth.

The months of February and March [1918] were a time for distributing livestock and equipment seized from the landowners in the autumn of 1917 and for dividing up the landed estates among the volunteers, the peasants and workers organised in agricultural communes. That this was a decisive moment, both in the construction of a new life and in the defence construction, was apparent to all the toilers of the district. Former line soldiers, under the leadership of the Revolutionary Committee occupied with the transfer into a communal fund of all the equipment and livestock from the landlords' estates and from the wealthy smallholders, leaving their owners two pairs of horses, one or two cows (depending on the size of the family), a plough, a seeder, a mower and a pitchfork, while the peasants went into the fields to finish the job of redistributing the land begun the previous autumn. At the same time, some of the peasants and workers, having already organised themselves into rural communes in the autumn, left their villages with their families and occupied the former, landlords' estates, ignoring the fact that the Red Guard detachments of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc had, in accordance with their treaty with the Austrian and German emperors, already evacuated the Ukraine, leaving it to fight with its small revolutionary-military formations an unequal battle against regular Austrian and German units assisted by detachments of the Ukrainian Central Rada. They settled there, nevertheless, losing no time in preparing their forces: part to carry on the spring work in the communes, and part to form battle detachments to defend the revolution and its gains, which the revolutionary toilers, if not everywhere, then in many districts, had won by themselves step by step, thereby setting an example for the whole country.

The agricultural communes were in most cases organised by peasants, though sometimes their composition was a mixture of peasants and workmen. Their organisation was based on the equality and solidarity of the members. All members of these communes — both men and women applied themselves willingly to their tasks, whether in the field or the household. The kitchens and dining rooms were communal. But any members of the commune who wanted to

cook separately for themselves and their children, or to take food from the communal kitchen and eat it in their own quarters, met with no objection from the other members of the commune.

Every member of the commune, or even a whole group of members, might arrange matters of food as they thought best, as long as they informed the commune in advance, so that all the members would know about it and could make the necessary preparations in the communal kitchen and storehouse. From experience it was necessary for the members of the commune to rise in good time in the morning to tend the oxen, horses, an other animals, and to perform other kinds of work. A member could at any time absent himself from the commune as long as he gave advance notice of this to the comrades with whom he worked most closely on communal tasks, so that the latter could cope with the work during his absence. This was the case during working periods. But during periods of rest (Sunday was considered a day of rest) all members of the commune took it in turns to go off on trips.

The management of each commune was conducted by a general meeting of all its members. After these meetings, each member, having his appointed task, knew what changes to make in it and so on. Only the matter of schooling in the commune was not precisely defined, because the communes did not want to resurrect the old type of school. As a new method they settled on the anarchist school of F. Ferrer<sup>1</sup> (about which reports were frequently read and brochures distributed by the Group of Anarchist-Communists), but not having properly trained people for this they sought through the Group of Anarchist-Communists to obtain better educated comrades from the towns and only as a last resort to invite to their communal schools teachers who knew only the traditional methods of instruction.

There were four such agricultural communes within a three- or four-mile radius of Gulyai-Polye. In the whole district, however, there were many. But I shall dwell on these four communes because I myself played a direct part in organising them. In all of them the first fruitful beginnings took place under my supervision, or, in a few cases, in consultation with me. To one of them, perhaps the largest, I gave my physical labour two days a week, during the spring sowing in the fields behind a plough or seeder, and before and after sowing in domestic work on the plantations or in the machine shop and so on. The remaining four days of the week I worked in Gulyai-Polye in the Group of Anarchist-Communists and in the district Revolutionary Committee. This was demanded of me by members of the group and by all the communes. It was demanded too by the very fact of revolution, which required the grouping and drawing together of revolutionary forces against the counter-revolution advancing from the west in the form of German and Austro-Hungarian monarchist armies and the Ukrainian Central Rada.

In all of the communes there were some peasant anarchists, but the majority of the members were not anarchists. Nevertheless, in their communal life they felt an anarchist solidarity such as manifests itself only in the practical life of ordinary toilers who have not yet tasted the political poison of the cities, with their atmosphere of deception and betrayal that smothers even many who call themselves anarchists. Each commune consisted of ten families of peasants and workers, totalling a hundred, two hundred or three hundred members. These communes took as much land as they were able to work with their own labour. Livestock and farm equipment were allotted by decision of the district congresses of land committees.

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<sup>1</sup> Francisco Ferrer (1859–1909), founder of the Modern School, which fostered a spirit of independence and spontaneity among the pupils. Ferrer, a respected libertarian, was court-martialled and executed in 1909 on charges of plotting against the Spanish king and fomenting rebellion in Barcelona.

And so the free toilers of the communes set to work, to the tune of free and joyous songs which reflected the spirit of the revolution and of those fighters who prophesied it and died for it or who lived and remained steadfast in the struggle for its 'higher justice', which must triumph over injustice, grow strong, and become the beacon of human life. They sowed their fields and cultivated their gardens, confident in themselves and in their firm resolve not to allow the return of those who had never laboured on the land but who had owned it by the laws of the state and were seeking to own it again.

The inhabitants of the villages and hamlets bordering on these communes, who were less politically conscious and not yet liberated from their servility to the kulaks, envied the communards and repeatedly expressed the desire to take away all the livestock and equipment that they had obtained from the former landlords and distribute it among themselves. 'Let the free communards buy it back from us,' they would say. But this impulse was severely condemned by an absolute majority of the toilers at their village assemblies and at all the congresses. For the majority of the toiling population saw in the organisation of rural communes the healthy germ of a new social life which, as the revolution triumphed and approached its creative climax, would grow and provide a model of a free and communal form of life, if not for the whole country, then at least for the hamlets and villages of our district.

The free communal order was accepted by the inhabitants of our district as the highest form of social justice. For the time being, however, the mass of people did not go over to it, citing as their reasons the advance of the German and Austrian armies, their own lack of organisation, and their inability to defend this order against the new 'revolutionary' and counter-revolutionary authorities. For this reason the toiling population of the district limited their real revolutionary activity to supporting in every way those bold spirits among them who had settled on the old estates and organised their personal and economic life on free communal lines.

# **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**

Nestor Makhno

# Chapter 1. Great October in the Ukraine

The month of October 1917 is a great historical watershed in the Russian revolution. That watershed consists of the awakening of the toilers of town and country to their right to seize control of their own lives and their social and economic inheritance; the cultivation of the soil, the housing, the factories, the mines, transportation, and lastly the education which had hitherto been used to strip our ancestors of all these assets.

However, as we see it, it would be wide of the mark if we were to see all of the content of the Russian revolution encapsulated in October: in fact, the Russian revolution was hatched over the preceding months, a period during which the peasants in the countryside and the workers in the towns grasped the essential point. Indeed, the revolution of February 1917 came to be a symbol for the toilers of their economic and political liberation. However, they quickly noticed that the February revolution as it evolved adopted the degenerated format characteristic of the liberal bourgeoisie, and, as such, proved incapable of embarking upon a project of social action. Whereupon the toilers immediately cast off the restraints imposed by February and set about openly severing all their ties to its pseudo-revolutionary aspect and its objectives.

In the Ukraine, there were two facets to this activity. At the time, the urban proletariat, in view of the meagerness of the anarchists' influence upon it on the one hand, and lack of information about the real political policies and domestic issues in the country on the other, reckoned that hoisting the Bolsheviks into power had become the most pressing necessity of the battle that had been joined for the pursuance of the revolution, if the coalition of Right Social Revolutionaries with the bourgeoisie was to be ousted.

Meanwhile, in the countryside, and especially in the Zaporozhe area of the Ukraine, where the autocracy had never quite managed to extirpate the spirit of freedom, the toiling revolutionary peasantry took it as its most over-riding and most basic duty to resort to direct revolutionary action in order to rid themselves as quickly as possible of the pomeshchiks and kulaks, being persuaded that this liberation would speed their victory against the socialist-bourgeois coalition.

This is the reason why the Ukrainian peasants went on the offensive, seizing the bourgeoisie's weaponry (particularly at the time of putschist General Kornilov's march on Petrograd in August 1917) and then refusing to pay the second annual installment of land levies to the big landlords and kulaks. (The agents of the coalition tried in fact to wrest the land from the peasants, in order to hold it for the estate-owners, allegedly in deference to the government's adherence to the status quo pending the convening of the Constituent Assembly which would decide on the matter).

The peasants then got up and seized the estates and livestock of the pomeshchiks, kulaks, monasteries and State holdings: in so doing, they always set up local committees to manage these assets, with an eye to sharing them out among the various villages and communes.

An instinctive anarchism clearly illumined all the plans of the Ukraine's toiling peasantry, which gave vent to an undisguised hatred of all State authority, a feeling accompanied by a plain ambition to liberate themselves. The latter, indeed, is very strong in the peasants: in essence it

boils down to, first, getting rid of the bourgeois authorities like the gendarmerie, the magistrates sent out by the central authorities, etc. This was put into practice in many regions in the Ukraine. There are examples aplenty of the way in which the peasants in the provinces of Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Poltava, Kharkov and part of Tavripol drove the gendarmerie out of their villages, or even stripped it of the right to make arrests without the say-so of the peasant committees and village assemblies. The gendarmes wound up as simply the bearers of the decisions these made. It was not long before the magistrates were reduced to like business.

The peasants themselves sat in judgment of all offenses and disputes at village assemblies or at special meetings, thereby denying all jurisdictional rights to the magistrates appointed by the central authorities. These magistrates sometimes fell so far from grace that they were often forced to flee or go into hiding.

Such an approach by the peasants to their individual and social rights naturally inclined them to fear lest the slogan “All power to the soviets” turn into a State power: these fears were perhaps less plainly evident among the urban proletariat, which was more under the sway of the social democrats and Bolsheviks.

To the peasants, the power of local soviets meant the conversion of those bodies into autonomous territorial units, on the basis of the revolutionary association and socio-economic self-direction of the toilers with an eye to the construction of a new society. Placing that sort of construction upon that slogan, the peasants applied it literally, expanded upon it and defended it against the trespasses of the Right SRs, Cadets (liberals) and the monarchist counter-revolutionaries.

Thus October had not yet happened when the peasants jumped the gun by refusing in many regions to pay the farm rents to the pomeshchiks and kulaks, then, having collectively seized the latter’s land and livestock, despatching delegates to the urban proletariat to come to some arrangement with it regarding the seizure of the factories and firms, the aim being to establish fraternal connections and, jointly, build the new, free society of toilers.

At this point, the practical implementation of the ideas of “Great October” had not yet been espoused by those who would later subscribe to it, the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs: it was even harshly criticized by their groups, organizations and central committees. On the other hand, as far as the Ukrainian peasants were concerned, Great October, and especially the status it was afforded in political chronology, looked very much like a chapter they had long since moved on from.

During the events in October, the proletariat of Petrograd, Moscow and other large cities, as well as the soldiers and the peasants adjacent to the towns, under the influence of anarchists, Bolsheviks and Left SRs, merely regularized and gave more precise political expression to that for which the revolutionary peasantry of many areas of the Ukraine had begun to struggle actively as early as the month of August 1917, and that in highly favorable conditions, enjoying, as they had, the backing of the urban proletariat.

The repercussions of the proletariat’s version of October reached the Ukraine a month and a half later. The intent behind it was evident at first from the appeals from the delegates from the soviets and parties, then from the decrees of the Soviet of People’s Commissars, about which the Ukrainian peasants were diffident, having had no part in their appointments.

It was then that groups of Red Guards showed up in the Ukraine, coming largely from Russia, and attacking the towns and communications centers controlled by the Cossacks of the Ukrainian Central Rada. The latter was so infected by chauvinism that it found it impossible to understand

that of the laboring population of the country could relate to their brethren from Russia, nor, above all, appreciate the revolutionary spirit at large among the toiling population which stood ready to fight for its social and political independence.

In offering this analysis of Great October on this, the occasion of its tenth anniversary, we ought to stress that what we accomplished in the Ukraine was perfectly in tune, in late 1917, with the actions of the revolutionary workers in Petrograd, Moscow and other great cities in Russia.

Whilst taking note of the revolutionary faith and enthusiasm displayed by the countryside of the Ukraine long before October, we respect and hold in every bit as high regard the determination and vigor displayed by the Russian workers, peasants and soldiers during the events of October.

In reviewing the past, we cannot let the present go unremarked, for it is bound up with October one way or another. Also, we can only state our profound distress at the fact that, after ten years, the ideas that were fully expressed in October are still the objects of derision from the very people that have come to power and governed Russia since in the name of those ideas.

We express our saddened solidarity to all who fought for the triumph of October and are currently rotting in prisons and concentration camps. Their sufferings under torture and famine have reached us and compel us to feel a profound sorrow, on this the tenth anniversary of October, in place of the usual joy.

As a matter of revolutionary duty, we raise our voice once again to cry across the borders of the USSR:

Give the sons of October their freedom, give them back their rights to organize and to spread their ideas!

In the absence of freedom, and rights for the toilers and revolutionary militants, the USSR is suffocating and doing to death the best part of itself. Its enemies are delighted by this and are making preparations world-wide, with the aid of all possible means, to extirpate the revolution and, with it, the USSR.

*Dyelo Truda* No 29, October 1927, pp. 9-11.

## Chapter 2. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Makhnovist Insurgent Movement in the Ukraine

As we know, the Bolshevik leaders' shameful betrayal of the ideas of the October Revolution led the entire Bolshevik party and its 'proletarian revolutionary' authority, once in place all across the country, to conclude a disgraceful peace with the German Kaiser Wilhelm II and the Austrian Emperor, Karl, followed by an even more deplorable struggle inside the country against anarchism, first of all, and then against the Left Social Revolutionaries and socialism in general. In June 1918, I met with Lenin in the Kremlin, at the instigation of Sverdlov, the then chairman of the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets. Citing my mandate as head of the Revolutionary Defense Committee in the Gulyai-Polye region, I briefed Lenin on the unequal fight waged by the revolutionary forces in the Ukraine against the Austro-German invaders and their allies on the Ukrainian Central Rada: he discussed this with me and, having noted my fanatical peasant attachment to the revolution and to the anarchist ideas it encapsulated, he assured me that the soviet authorities had initiated a struggle in the urban centers of the revolution, not against anarchism per se, but rather against the bandits who professed to be its followers:

With those anarchists engaged in organized revolutionary activity, like the ones you have just been talking about, our Bolshevik party and I myself will always be able to speak the same language with an eye to building a joint revolutionary front... It is quite another matter with the social-traitors who are the real enemies of the genuine emancipation of the proletariat and the poor peasantry: with regard to them, my attitude will always be unbending: I am their enemy.

The degree of guile and hypocrisy that Lenin exhibited on that occasion is but rarely encountered in a master-politician. By that point the Bolshevik authorities had already orchestrated repression against anarchism, in the very deliberate intention of discrediting it in the country. Lenin's Bolshevism had placed an X against every free revolutionary organization and anarchism alone was still enough of a danger to it, for, had it but learned to act in an organized and strictly consistent way among the broad masses of the workers and peasants, so as to steer them to victory in political and strategic terms, anarchism alone could have conjured up all that was healthy and utterly committed to the revolution in the country and expected to make the ideas of freedom, equality and free labor practical living realities through its struggle.

Let it be noted that, vis-a-vis socialists, Lenin employed equally insulting tones... The Bolshevik authorities' offensive against anarchism and socialism rendered great service at that juncture to the foreign counter-revolutionaries, whose troops were making easy headway into revolutionary territory in the Ukraine and swiftly ousting all the revolutionary fighting detachments led by anarchists, Social Revolutionaries or indeed by the odd Bolshevik.

Thanks to this disgraceful treachery by the Bolshevik leaders, the counter-revolution was able in short order to paralyze all revolutionary links between the towns and villages of the Ukraine, before turning to massive repression. In this way, the Ukrainian revolution found itself quite unexpectedly before the gallows of its executioners and was well chastened in this first stage of its development...

Those were dark days filled with bloody horrors. Under the agreements reached with the Central Emperors, the Bolshevik leaders evacuated all the well armed and disciplined revolutionary detachments of Russian workers from the Ukraine, at a time when the Ukrainian workers were poorly armed, direly equipped and compelled to fall back in the wake of their Russian brethren, powerless to confront the revolution's enemies. In sometimes bloody skirmishing, they clashed with the Bolshevik authorities who were refusing them entry into Russia with their weaponry. It was in those days, when all seemed lost, that the revolutionary peasants, united around the libertarian communist group in Gulyai-Polye and dispersed in numerous groups and detachments, also retreated towards Russia, where, they reckoned, the revolution was still on course and might help them recover the strength they needed to tackle the counter-revolutionary invaders again... Unfortunately, even at that stage in the revolution, the Bolshevik leadership could be seen turning clearly against all that was healthy and revolutionary in the toiling masses, who were systematically denigrated to the benefit of their party privileges and the runaway counter-revolution lurking behind them. On the approaches to the town of Taganrog, the Bolshevik authorities set up ambushes of independent revolutionary groups and detachments in the intention of stripping them of their weapons. This circumstance led the forces from the proud revolutionary region of Gulyai-Polye to break up into tiny groups, some of which made their way home surreptitiously, whilst others gathered equally clandestinely in Taganrog to determine what should be done thereafter...

In Taganrog, I was commissioned along with Veretelnikov (by the group of comrades there) to organize a conference. It went ahead. Its resolutions were short but to the point, in that no participant had decided to continue the fall-back. With the exception of myself, Veretelnikov and three other comrades, all the others decided to rejoin the front lines and work away there discreetly among the peasantry, with the utmost caution. My four colleagues and I were commissioned by the conference to spend two or three months in Moscow, Petrograd and Kronstadt so as to familiarize ourselves with the progress of the revolution in those revolutionary centers, before returning to the Ukraine by the first days of July, to the areas where it had been determined that free Revolutionary Defense battalions were to be organized, the clear intention being not just to fight but also to win.

Alone of my comrades, I was able to make it back to the Ukraine in time: there the Austro-Germans and their stooge, the Hetman Skoropadsky, were indulging their political and economic whims. I found but few of my old comrades there, most of them having been killed or jailed pending execution. Deeply convinced of the necessity of carrying out the task with which I had been entrusted by the Taganrog conference, I made contact with the region's peasants with an eye to choosing from among them persons disposed to commit themselves to the struggle. I had meetings with numerous peasant men and women whom I had earlier had occasion to bring around to my way of thinking. With their help, I managed to trace certain of my comrades who had escaped the arrests and shootings by the Austro-Germans and the executioners of the revolution, and who were still determined to fight back. Not waiting for our comrades to return from Russia, and undeterred by the risks involved in our sojourns in villages, which were for-

ever subject to raids and search operations by the occupiers and their allies, often followed by the arrest and execution of our most active comrades, we managed quite quickly to get up and running an organization designed to pave the way to the revolutionary uprising of the peasant masses against the Hetman and his feudal-agrarian regime, as well as against their protectors, the Austro-Hungarian-German troops. Our language at the time went like this:

Peasants, workers and you, the working intelligentsia! Support the rebirth and expansion of the revolution as the most reliable weapon in the fight against Capital and the State! Support the creation and strengthening of a free society of workers in your life-time, our common objective! You must organize yourselves, form partisan style revolutionary combat detachments and battalions from among your ranks, then rise up, set upon the Hetman and the Austro-German emperors — those who sent their savage counter-revolutionary armies against us — and at all costs defeat these executioners of the revolution and of freedom ... !

The toiling masses listened to us and they understood us. Villages and hamlets far removed from Gulyai-Polye itself sent their delegates to see us, seeking to join the anarchist group and then bring one of its members back with them for discussions and to prepare the way for the uprising. At that time I used to travel either alone or with three or four comrades: I held clandestine meetings with the peasants from these villages and districts. After two months of this demanding and dogged propaganda and organizing effort, carried out by the region's peasants, our Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group observed that a swarm of workers stood ready to follow its lead, among them many armed rebels determined to put an end to the economic and political arbitrariness of the Hetman and the Austro-German junkers.

I recall one time when the delegates from the units which we had already organized spent a week touring the region in an attempt to link up with me. I who was the man the bourgeoisie and the Austro-German command loved to hate. For my part, I too traveled around from village to village in the company of two or three comrades, carrying out my organizing drive. They managed to link up with me and on behalf of those who had sent them, they asked me not to postpone the unleashing of the general armed insurrection against the revolution's enemies to some date deemed more opportune. They informed me:

(...) Nestor Ivanovitch, come back to Gulyai-Polye to raise its inhabitants in revolt! If they rise, all villages, districts and regions will follow suit. With your band of agitator comrades, by dint of your zealous efforts, you have already brought your township of Gulyai-Polye to a rare fever pitch of revolutionary revolt against the Hetman and the Austro-Germans. Your summons, issued from rebel Gulyai-Polye, will do more for the work of insurrection for which we will all prepare ourselves, than all these weeks you have spent touring the villages to prepare the way for this undertaking with verbal agitation, exposing your very life to the greatest risks.

I did not let myself be swayed by such trust and the tribute paid to our group and to me personally. Devoid of any revolutionary vanity, I strove to inculcate the same precept into my friends and the masses among whom we were operating; it was a matter of retaining the lucidity and understanding that we had conjured into existence for the prosecution of the revolution, which had been stalled for the time being by the counter-revolutionary executioners.

My travels through the revolutionary centers of Russia, the experiences and observations I had garnered from them, had all opened my eyes to a lot of things. It was for all these reasons that along with my friends from the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group, I had devoted myself to the organizing of the peasant uprising against the enemies of the revolution and been scrupulously watchful lest any underplaying of our role make us forgetful of the real tasks that had fallen to our lot. Thus to all the importunate demands from peasants that the rising be unleashed, I continually repeated, in my capacity as instigator and chief of the insurrection:

Down your way, are all your forces connected enough with your group in organizational terms? Have you all understood that the insurrection must erupt everywhere at the same time, even though the different districts are far from one another?

— If you have realized that, it would not be a waste of time to reflect one more time on the most productive way of launching our armed struggle. Especially as we are a long way from having access to the same technical resources as our enemies, when indeed our first blows we strike will have to secure us a number of rifles and artillery pieces, as well as twenty cartridges and shells for each rifle and cannon.

— Such a success will be doubly satisfying to us, for we shall promptly derive greater determination from it, politically, organizationally and in fighting terms alike. Following that initial success, all our partisan detachments will fall upon the enemy from every side, thereby sowing the most utter confusion among the Austro-German command and the Hetman's government, in our Lower Dniepr and Donet Basin region at any rate. Then, during the summer, events should take a more favorable turn for us and allow us to step up our struggle even further.

These were terms in which we anarchist peasants addressed the toiling masses at a time of dire difficulty for the revolution and our movement's ideas. The question might be posed: Why were we so very, perhaps even unduly, cautious about our influence over the masses, when they were the first to call for an uprising against the oppressors? Why, it might be asked, when we were naturally carried away by the spirit of revolt, had we not simply placed ourselves at the head of these masses, so imbued with the elements unleashed by the revolutionary anarchist tempest which was quite bereft of ulterior political motives? Now this might seem odd, but our attitude was determined solely by the circumstances of the time especially by those that in the libertarian movement are only rarely acknowledged as crucial. Indeed, for an active revolutionary vanguard, this was a time of great strain, for it required painstaking preparation of the uprising. Our Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group was just such a vanguard and events led it to pose the question of whether it should assume complete responsibility for leading the movement of the seething toiling masses or surrender that role to someone of these parties with their ready made programs and which also had access to direct support from the 'revolutionary' Bolshevik government in Moscow?

That question made life difficult for our group, especially as in such busy times there was no question of invoking anarchism's abstract notions with their rejection of disciplined organization of revolutionary forces, the upshot of which was that anarchists would have found themselves isolated in revolutionary activity and stranded by the very existence of the creative and productive part that was in principle theirs to play. For all the revolutionary ardor and first hand experience that impelled us to spare no effort to thwart the counter-revolution, we aspired to act

as anarchists with an abiding faith in the correctness of the doctrine's fundamental principles. However, we were well aware of the disorganization prevailing within the anarchist movement, doing it considerable damage and playing into the hands of the Bolsheviks and the Left Social Revolutionaries. We also realized that this habitual disorganization was a lot more firmly rooted among most anarchists than the positive aspects of their teaching and that as a result, this disorganization was so much the chief trait of the anarchist movement that it could not be either comprehended or supported by the masses, who had no desire to go blindly to their deaths in some pointless struggle.

We had furnished the best possible solution to this problem by organizing the insurrection directly and paying no heed to the possible carping from our fellow-believers regarding this vanguardist stance which they saw as ill suited to anarchist teachings. Thus in practice we disposed of such inconsequential blather that was so damaging to our cause and concentrated instead on seeing the struggle through to complete victory. However, this required that revolutionary anarchism, if it sought to play its part properly and fulfill its active task in contemporary revolutions, face up to immense demands of an organizational nature whether in the training of its personnel or in defining its dynamic role in the early days of the revolution when the toiling masses were often groping their way.

Cognizant of the atomization of anarchist circles and their semi-legal existence towns and cities, where the Bolsheviks were set upon destroying them or making them into auxiliaries of the Bolshevik authorities, we peasant anarchists operated in the countryside in such a way as to ensure that the voice of our anarchist movement got a hearing there and to draw out all that was best and healthiest from the towns so as to raise the flag of revolt against the Hetman and his Austro-German sponsors.

It was with this in mind that our group schooled the region's toiling peasantry whilst not surrendering one iota of basic anarchist principles: it boosted the armed struggle and drafted the political program of the insurgent movement which soon came to known everywhere as the "Batko Makhno revolutionary units."

So strong and productive were the group's influence and my own that no political force inimical to anarchism, particularly the socialist parties, had any chance of prevailing against them in the minds of the insurgent masses, who heeded neither their slogans nor indeed the speechifying of their orators. Makhno's words and those of the members of the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist peasant group regarding the freedom and independence of workers vis-a-vis Capital and its servant, the State, were taken on board by the masses and their import regarded as the basis for the struggle to replace the noxious organization of bourgeois capitalist society by the free organization of toilers.

It was in the name of that objective that the peasant masses created a mighty armed force, placed it under the command of the Staff organized by the Gulyai-Polye libertarian group and thereafter sustained it on a permanent basis. These economic and psychological ties were never broken after that, with the toiling population unstintingly rallying around the movement even in its darkest days, keeping it supplied with manpower and provisions.

In this way the Gulyai-Polye region quickly became a land apart, for all statist tendencies were banished from its self-organization. The savage hordes of Austro-Germans who had hitherto known no restraint upon their arbitrariness, were smashed and disarmed, with their weaponry being taken over by the movement.

Consequently these troops began to scurry out of the region: as for the Hetman Skoropadsky's men, some were hanged, others driven out. The Bolshevik government soon learned of the existence of this proud region as well as of the anarchists who were the inspiration behind its insurgent movement. It was at this point that Bolshevik newspapers used to make no bones about citing the name of Makhno on their front pages, reporting daily the successes of the campaign waged under his leadership.

The insurgent movement forged ahead. Having routed the Austro-Germans, then driven out the Hetman's men from a succession of districts in the Ukraine, it encountered the beginnings of the Denikinist backlash and the Ukrainian Directory – better known as the 'Petliurovshchina' – against which they promptly deployed all their efforts under the direction of the anarchist peasants, as ever, they being the revolution's most devoted sons. A broad front was built up against these new foes and heroic military operations conducted in the interests of the revolution and a new, free society of toilers.

Against this backdrop, the anarchist peasants organized the insurgent movement of the Ukraine's toilers, which subsequently grew into the Makhnovist movement. In light of this summary, albeit an incomplete one, those who have encountered the fairy tales peddled by the enemies of the Makhnovshchina and on occasion by certain of its "friends," daring to suggest that this grassroots movement had no ideology, that its doctrinal and political inspirations alike were drawn from outside, will be in a position to conclude that such allegations are utterly without foundation.

The guides of the movement, as well as the toiling peasant masses who backed it from start to finish, are well aware that it was organized by the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group and that it always enshrined the anarchist expectations of those who were not misled by revolutionary verbalism nor by the chaotic tendencies and irresponsible mentality so frequently encountered in the towns. The inspirations and organizers of the insurgent movement such as the Karetnik brothers, Alexis Marchenko, the Semenyuta brothers, the Domashenko brothers, the Makhno brothers, Lyuty, Zuichenko, Korostelev, Troyan, Danilov, Tykhenko, Moshtchenko, A. Chubenko and lots of others, were all anarchists. Many of them had been active among the peasants back in 1906–1907 and were in fact the movement's pioneers. It was they, along with others from inside the movement, who sustained it in terms of its political ideas as well as of its military and strategic organization. Any help from anarchist organizations, the ones closest in terms of their thinking, was eagerly awaited but to our great regret was never forthcoming in an organizational way. For the first nine months of its military operations against the revolution's enemies, the anarchist movement saw nothing from what should have been its natural friends, the urban anarchists. It was only later that some came out to join it, in an individual capacity mainly, especially those who were indebted to the movement for their release from enemy hands. The libertarian communist group from Ivanovo-Vosnessensk, headed by comrades Makeyev and A. Chernyakov, was the only one to throw in its lot with the Makhnovist movement, in an organizational way. It rendered it needed and significant help, but unfortunately only temporarily, for most of its members drifted away a short time later.

Throughout these tough years of an unequal, exacting and (politically and historically) telling struggle, the Makhnovist movement drew all its sustenance exclusively from its own internal resources. This, I am convinced, was the essential reason why it was able to stick staunchly to its revolutionary post and, despite the endless fighting due to its being encircled at all times, the reason why it followed no other path but that of anarchism and social revolution.

Abiding by its anarchist ideas, forbidding the State and its supporters from interfering with the self-direction of the urban and rural toilers in their endeavors to build a free society, the Makhnovist movement could not of course expect any help from the statist political parties: on the other hand, it was entitled to look for such help to the anarchist organizations in the towns, which help, unfortunately, never came. Disorganizational practices were so deep rooted at that time among the bulk of the anarchists as to blind them to what was going on in the countryside. On the whole, they failed to notice or to grasp in time the anarchist spirit abroad in the peasantry, and, as a result to bring their influence to bear on the urban workers' organizations. Having taken note of this dereliction, the Makhnovist movement thus has no reason to feel grateful for this defect in the anarchists' urban organizations. Out of this appreciation arose its faith in the rightness of the positions it adopted regarding the revolutionary endeavor. It was able to abide firmly by these, which enabled it to fight on for so many years whilst relying solely upon its own resources. In thereby living up to its revolutionary duty, which was both onerous and crucial, the Makhnovist movement made but one serious mistake: it joined forces with Bolshevism to wage a joint campaign against Wrangel and the Entente. While that compact lasted, and it was certainly valuable practically and psychologically for the success of the revolution, the Makhnovist movement was mistaken about the Bolsheviks' revolutionism and failed to take preventive steps in time against their treachery. The Bolsheviks treacherously attacked it, with the assistance of all their "soldiery" and, albeit with great difficulty, defeated it for a time.

From *Djelo Truda* No. 44–45, January/February 1928, pp. 3–7.

## Chapter 3. On Defense of the Revolution

Within the context of the debate that has taken place among our comrades from many lands regarding the *Draft Platform of the General Union of Anarchists*, published by the group of Russian anarchists abroad, I have been asked from several quarters to write a piece specifically devoted to the issue of the defense of the revolution. I shall strive to deal with it most diligently, but, before I do, I think I have a duty to inform comrades that this is not the central issue of the *Draft Platform*: the crux of it is the necessity of achieving the most consistent unity in our libertarian communist ranks. That portion asks only for amendment and completion before implementation. Otherwise, if we do not strive to marshal our forces, our movement will be condemned to succumb once and for all to the influences of liberals and opportunists who haunt our circles, if not outright speculators and political adventurers, who, at best, can prattle on and on but are incapable of fighting on the ground for the attainment of our great objectives. The latter can only happen if we carry along with us all who instinctively believe in the rightness of our struggle and who seek to achieve the widest possible freedom and independence through revolution, so as to build a new life and a new society, wherein the individual may at last and unimpeded exercise his creative drive on behalf of the general good.

As far as the specific issue of defense of the revolution goes, I shall be relying upon my first-hand experiences during the Russian revolution in the Ukraine, in the course of that unequal, but decisive struggle waged by the revolutionary movement of the Ukrainian toilers. Those experiences taught me, first, that defense of the revolution is directly bound up with its offensive against the Counterrevolution: secondly, its expansion and its intensity are at all times conditioned by the resistance of the counter-revolutionaries: thirdly, what follows from the above, namely that revolutionary actions are closely dependent on the political content, structure and organizational methods adopted by the armed revolutionary detachments, who are obliged to confront conventional, counter-revolutionary armies along a huge front.

In its fight against its enemies, the Russian revolution at first began by organizing Red Guard detachments under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. It was very quickly spotted that these failed to withstand the pressures from enemy troops, to be specific, the German, Austrian and Hungarian expeditionary corps, for the simple reason that, most of the time, they operated without any overall operational guide-lines. That is why the Bolsheviks turned in the spring of 1918 to the organization of a Red Army.

It was then that we issued the call to form “free battalions” of Ukrainian toilers. It quickly transpired that that organization was powerless to survive internal provocations of every sort, given that, without adequate vetting, political or social, it took in all volunteers provided only that they wanted to take up their weapons and fight. This was why the armed units established by that organization were treacherously delivered to the enemy, a fact that prevented it from seeing through its historical mission in the fight against the foreign counter-revolution.

However, following that initial set-back to the “free battalions” organization – which might be described as fighting units of the revolution’s first line of defense – we did not lose our heads.

The organization was somewhat overhauled in its format: the battalions were complemented by light partisan detachments of a mixed type, that is, comprising infantry and cavalry alike. The task of these detachments was to operate far behind the enemy's lines. This organization proved itself during its operations against the Austro-German expeditionary forces and the bands of the Hetman Skoropadsky, their ally, during the late summer and autumn of 1918.

Sticking to that form of organizing the defense of the revolution, the Ukrainian toilers were able to wrest from the clutches of the counter-revolutionaries the noose that the latter had thrown around the revolution in the Ukraine. What is more, not content with defending the revolution, they followed it through as fully as they could.

As the internal counter-revolution spread inside the country, it received aid from other countries, not just in the form of arms and munitions but also in the shape of troops. Despite that, our organization of the defense of the revolution also expanded in size and at the same time, as the need arose, adopted a new format and more suitable fighting methods.

We know that the most perilous counter-revolutionary front at that time was manned by the army of General Denikin: however, the insurgent movement held its own against him for five to six months. A fair number of the best Denikinist commanders came to grief against our units which had no weapons other than those taken from the enemy. Our organization made a large contribution to that: without trampling on the autonomy of the fighting units, it reorganized them into regiments and brigades coordinated by a common operational Staff. It is true that the establishment of the latter was feasible only thanks to the appreciation by the toiling revolutionary masses serving on the front lines facing the enemy as well as behind his lines, of the necessity of a single military command. Furthermore, still under the influence of our libertarian communist peasant group from Gulyai-Polye, the toilers also saw to it that every individual was awarded equal rights to take part in the construction of the new society, in every sphere, including the obligation to defend its gains.

Thus, whilst the Denikin front threatened the very life of the libertarian revolution which was being watched with a lively interest by the population at large, the revolutionary toilers came together on the basis of our organizational notion of defense of the revolution, making that their own and they bolstered the insurgent army with a regular influx of fresh combatants to relieve the wounded and the weary.

Elsewhere, the practical requirements of the struggle induced our movement to establish an operational and organizational Staff to share the oversight of all the fighting units. It is because of this practice that I find myself unable to subscribe to the view that revolutionary anarchists reject the need for such a Staff to oversee the armed revolutionary struggle strategically. I am convinced that any revolutionary anarchist finding himself in the same circumstances as those I encountered in the civil war in the Ukraine will, of necessity, be impelled to do as we did. If, in the course of the coming authentic social revolution, there are anarchists who rebut these organizational principles, then in our movement we will have only empty chatteringers or dead-weight, harmful elements who will be rejected in short order.

In tackling the resolution of the matter of the revolution's defense, anarchists must unceasingly look to the social character of libertarian communism. Faced with a mass revolutionary movement, we have to acknowledge the need to organize that and endow it with means worthy of it, then throw ourselves into it whole-heartedly. Otherwise, if we appear to be dreamers and utopians, then we must not hamper the toilers' struggle, in particular those who follow the state socialists. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, anarchism is and remains a revolutionary social

movement and that is why I am and always will be an advocate of its having a well articulated organization and support the establishment, come the revolution, of battalions, regiments, brigades and divisions designed to amalgamate, at certain times, into one common army, under a single regional command in the shape of supervisory organizational Staffs. The task of the latter will be, according to the requirements and conditions of the struggle, to draw up a federative operational plan, co-ordinating the actions of regional armies, so as to bring to a successful conclusion the fighting conducted on all fronts against the armed counter-revolution.

The matter of the defence of the revolution is no easy matter: it may require very great organisational commitment from the revolutionary masses. Anarchists must realise that and stand by to assist them in that undertaking.

*Dyelo Truda* No 25, June 1927, pp. 13-14.

## Chapter 4. A Few Words on the National Question in the Ukraine

In the wake of the abolition of tsarist despotism at the time of the 1917 revolution, prospects of new, free relations between peoples hitherto in subjection beneath the violent yoke of the Russian State, appeared on the horizons of the world of Labor. The notion of complete self-determination, up to and including a complete break with the Russian State, thus emerged naturally among these peoples. Groups of every persuasion sprang up among the Ukrainian population by the dozen: each of them had its own outlook and interpreted the idea of self-determination according to its own factional interests. All in all, the toiling masses of the Ukraine did not identify with these groups and did not join them.

Over seven years have elapsed since, and the Ukrainian toilers' line on the notion of self-determination has developed and their understanding increased. Now they identified with it and they displayed this often in their life-style. Thus, for example, they asserted their rights to use their own language and their entitlement to their own culture, which had been regarded prior to the revolution as anathema. They also asserted their right to conform in their lives to their own way of life and specific customs. In the aim of building an independent Ukrainian State, certain statist gentlemen would dearly love to arrogate to themselves all natural manifestations of Ukrainian reality, against which the Bolsheviks, by the way, are powerless to fight, for all their omnipotence. However, these statist gentlemen cannot seem to carry the broad masses of toilers with them, much less mobilize them in this way for a struggle against the oppressive Bolshevik party. The healthy instincts of the Ukrainian toilers and their baleful life under the Bolshevik yoke has not made them oblivious of the State danger in general. For that reason, they shun the chauvinist trend and do not mix it up with their social aspirations, rather seeking their own road to emancipation.

There is food there for serious thought on the part of all Ukrainian revolutionaries and for libertarian communists in particular, if they aim after this to engage in consistent work among the Ukrainian toilers.

Such work, though, cannot be conducted along the same lines as in the years 1918–1920, for the reality in the country has altered a lot. Then, the Ukrainian laboring population, which had played such a significant part in crushing all of the bourgeoisie's mercenaries — Denikin, Petliura and Wrangel — could never have dreamed that, at the far end of the revolution, it would find itself so ignominiously deceived and exploited by the Bolsheviks.

Those were the days when we were all fighting against the restoration of the tsarist order. There was not enough time then to scrutinize and vet all the "blow-ins" showing up to join the struggle. Faith in the revolution overruled all second thoughts about the mettle of these "blow-ins" or the questions that might have been raised about them; should they be counted as friends or foes? At the time, the toilers were on the move against the counter-revolution, heedful only

of those who showed up to share their front ranks in confronting death fearlessly in defense of the revolution.

Later, the psychology of the Ukrainian toilers changed a lot: they had had the time to familiarize themselves to saturation point with these “blow-ins” to their cause, and thereafter were more critical in their accounting of what they had won through the revolution, or at least what remains of that. Behind these “blow-ins” they recognize their outright enemies, even though these Ukrainianized themselves and wave the flag of socialism, for, in actuality, they watch them operate in such a way as to add to the exploitation of Labor. They are clear in their minds that it was this caste of socialists, voracious exploiters, that stripped them of all their revolutionary gains. In short, as far as they are concerned it is something akin to the Austro-German occupation camouflaged behind all manner of Bolshevik sleight of hand.

This disguised occupation prompts from the masses a certain chauvinist backlash directed against the “blow-ins”. Not for nothing do these Bolshevik gentlemen govern the Ukraine from Moscow, hiding behind their Ukrainian cat’s paws: it is the growing hatred from the Ukrainian masses that has commended this course to them. It is the very nature of the Bolshevik despotism that is driving the Ukrainian toilers to search for ways of overthrowing it and making progress towards a new and truly free society. The Bolsheviks are not resting on their laurels either and are striving to adapt at all costs to Ukrainian reality. In 1923, they ended up like lost sheep: since which they have modified their tactics and wasted no time in getting to grips with Ukrainian reality. Furthermore, they have wasted no time in associating the fate of Bolshevism with that of nationalism, and they have, in pursuance of this, added specific articles to the ‘Constitution of the USSR’, affording every component people of that Union full rights of self-determination, indeed of secession. All of which is, of course, mere show. How is this attitude of the Bolsheviks going to develop? The next few years will tell. Anarchists’ approach to the reality of the Ukraine now should take due account of these new factors — the Ukrainian toilers’ hatred for the “blow-ins” of nationalist Bolshevism. By our reckoning, their chief task today consists of explaining to the masses that the root of all evil is not some “blow-in” authorities, but all authority in general. The history of recent years will afford considerable weight to their argument, for the Ukraine has seen a parade of all manner of authorities and, when all is said and done, these have been as indistinguishable one from another as peas in a pod. We must demonstrate that a “blow-in” State power and an “independent” State power amount to just about equal in value and that the toilers have nothing to gain from either: they should focus all their attention elsewhere: on destroying the nests of the State apparatus and replacing these with worker and peasant bodies for social and economic self-direction.

In spite of everything, in broaching the national question, we should not overlook the latest developments in the Ukraine. Ukrainian is being spoken now, and by virtue of the new nationalist trend, outsiders who do not speak the local language are scarcely listened to. This is an ethnic thing that ought to be kept in the forefront of our minds. Whereas, up to now, anarchists have enjoyed only a feeble audience among the Ukrainian peasantry, that was because they were concentrated above all in the towns and, what is more, did not use the national tongue of the Ukrainian countryside.

Ukrainian life is filled with all sorts of possibilities, especially the potential for a mass revolutionary movement. Anarchists have a great chance of influencing that movement, indeed becoming its mentors, provided only that they appreciate the diversity of real life and espouse a position to wage a single-minded, direct and declared fight against those forces hostile to the

toilers which might have ensconced themselves there. That is a task that cannot be accomplished without a large and powerful Ukrainian anarchist organization. It is for Ukrainian anarchists to give that some serious thought, starting now.

*Dyelo Truda* No 19, December 1928.

## Chapter 5. To the Jews of All Countries

Jewish citizens! In my first “Appeal to Jews”, published in the French libertarian newspaper, *Le Libertaire*, I asked Jews in general, which is to say the bourgeois and the socialist ones as well as the ‘anarchist’ ones like Yanovsky, who have all spoken of me as a pogromist against Jews and labeled as anti-Semitic the liberation movement of the Ukrainian peasants and workers of which I was the leader, to detail to me the specific facts instead of blathering vacuously away: just where and just when did I or the aforementioned movement perpetrate such acts?

I had expected that Jews in general would answer my “Appeal” after the manner of people eager to disclose to the civilized world the truth about these blackguards responsible for the massacres of Jews in the Ukraine, or indeed that they might attempt to base their shameful anecdotes about me and the Makhnovist movement upon fairly authentic data in that they involve me in them and peddle them to public opinion.

Thus far, no such evidence advanced by Jews has come to my attention. The only thing that has appeared thus far in the press generally, certain Jewish anarchist organs included, regarding myself and the insurgent movement I led, has been the product of the most shameless lies and of the vulgarity of certain political mavericks and their hirelings. Moreover, revolutionary fighting units made up of Jewish workers played a role of prime importance in that movement. The cowardice of slanderers washes over me, for I have always dismissed it for what it is. Jewish citizens may be assured of this if they note that I said not one single word about the travesty from the pen of one Joseph Kessel, entitled *Makhno and his Jewess*, a novel written on the basis of misinformation regarding myself and the movement connected with me organizationally and theoretically. The nub of that travesty is lifted from the writings of a lick spittle lackey of the Bolsheviks, one Colonel Gerassimenko, recently convicted by the Czech courts of spying on behalf of a Bolshevik military organization.

The novelette is also based upon articles by a bourgeois journalist, one Arbatov, who unashamedly credits me with all manner of violence perpetrated against a troupe of “performing dwarves.” An invention from start to finish, of course.

In his novel which simply hives with falsehoods, Kessel contrives to portray me in such an odious light that, at least in those passages where he borrows from the writings of Gerassimenko and Arbatov, he should have named his sources! To the extent that falsehood plays the main role in this novel and that the sources are inconsistent, silence was the only response open to me.

I take a quite different view of the slanders emanating from Jewish societies, which seek to create the impression in their co-religionists that they have diligently scrutinized the despicable and screamingly unjust acts perpetrated against the Jewish population in the Ukraine and whose perpetrators these societies seek to denounce.

A little while ago, one of these societies, which by the way has its headquarters in the kingdom of the Bolsheviks, has issued a book, illustrated with photographs, about the atrocities committed against the Jewish population in the Ukraine and( Belorussia, this on the basis of materials amassed by ‘comrade’ Ostrovsky, which patently means: of Bolshevik provenance. In this ‘his-

torical' document there is nowhere any mention of the anti-Jewish pogroms carried out by the much-vaunted First Red Army Cavalry when it passed through the Ukraine en route from the Caucasus in May 1920. By contrast, the same document does mention a number of pogroms and alongside prints the photographs of Makhnovist insurgents, though it is not clear what they are doing there, on the one hand, and which, in point of fact are no even Makhnovists, as witness the photograph purporting to show 'Makhnovists on the move' behind a black flag displaying a death's head: this is a photo that has no connection with pogroms and indeed and especially does not show Makhnovists at all.

An even more significant misrepresentation, targeting myself and the Makhnovists alike, can be seen in the photographs showing the streets of Alexandrovsk, allegedly laid waste following a pogrom mounted by Makhnovists, in the summer of 1919. This crude lie is unforgivable in the Jewish society responsible for publication, for it is common knowledge in the Ukraine that at the time in question the Makhnovist insurgent army was far from that region: it had fallen back into the western Ukraine. Indeed, Alexandrovsk had been under Bolshevik control from February to June 1919, and then been in Denikinist hands until the autumn.

With these documents, the Bolshevik-inclined Jewish society has done a great disservice to me and to the Makhnovist movement: unable to find documentary evidence with which to arraign us — for the benefit of its sponsors — on charges of anti-Jewish pogroms, it has resorted to blatant faking of evidence that has no connection either with me or with the insurgent movement. Its perfidious approach is even more glaringly apparent when it reproduces a photograph — "Makhno, a 'peaceable' citizen" when in fact the person shown is someone absolutely unknown to me.

On all these grounds I regarded it as my duty to address myself to the international Jewish community in order to draw attention to the cowardice and lying of certain Jewish associations in thrall to the Bolsheviks, in charging me personally and also the insurgent movement which I led, of anti-Jewish pogroms. International Jewish opinion must scrupulously examine the substance of these infamous allegations, for the peddling of such nonsense is scarcely the best way of establishing, in the eyes of all, the truth about what the Ukraine's Jewish population endured, not forgetting the fact that these lies serve only to misrepresent History completely.

*Dyelo Truda* No 23–24, April–May 1927, pp. 8–10.

## Chapter 6. The Makhovshchina and Anti-Semitism

For the past seven years, almost, the enemies of the Makhnovist revolutionary movement have wallowed in so many lies about it that one might marvel that these people do not take a red face, once in a while at least. It is rather characteristic that these shameless lies directed against myself and the Makhnovist insurgents, indeed against our movement as a whole, can unite folk from very different socio-political camps: among them one can find journalists of every persuasion, writers, scholars and laymen who place obstacles in their path, mavericks and speculators, who occasionally have no hesitation in putting themselves forward as pathfinders for avant-garde revolutionary ideas. One can also come across supposed anarchists, like Yanovsky, from the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*. All such folk, folk of every persuasion and every hue, have no shame about employing lies against us, without even knowing us, sometimes without any real belief in their own allegations. Such lies are rounded off with innuendo, which consists of forever and always railing at us, without any attempt to verify the grounds for that ranting and raving. In fact, where are the probable grounds to justify this hysteria in the slightest degree? A little while ago, all these bare-faced lies against us Makhnovists, alleging us to have been pogromists, without offering one shred of evidence or any sort of authentication, led me to address the world's Jews through the good offices of the French and Russian libertarian press, to ask them to spell out the sources of all these absurdities, so as to supply specific details regarding pogroms, incitement or instigation of pogroms carried out or launched by the Ukrainian toilers' revolutionary movement led by me.

The well known Parisian 'Faubourg' Club was alone in replying to my "Appeal to the Jews of All Countries". Through the press, the club managers let it be known that, at a meeting on 23 June 1927, the following question would come up for debate: "Was 'General' Makhno the friend of the Jews or did he participate in their slaughter?" It was added that our French comrade Lecoin would be speaking in defense of Makhno.

It goes without saying that as soon as I learned of the holding of this 'Faubourg' debate, I immediately approached the club chairman, Poldes, requesting him by letter that Lecoin be withdrawn and that I be afforded the opportunity to address the club on my own behalf. Following a positive reply, I appeared before the assembled club on 23 June 1927.

However, the particular manner in which debates were conducted in that club and the fact that the matter of concern to me was dealt with only towards the close of the proceedings meant that I was only able to make myself heard very late on, around 11:00 P.M. and I was not able to go into the matter thoroughly. The best I managed was to broach the subject by dealing with the historical nature, sources and patterns of anti-Semitism in the Ukraine.

Perhaps my enemies will make capital out of this factor which was beyond my control and above all of the fact that I was bound hand and foot by it. In fact, according to French police regulations, I was forbidden to communicate with my like-minded French colleagues: as a result, there was no way that I could have organized a public meeting of my own to put my rebuttal of

these slanders. Also, some people have brazenly lied and talked about my having been “tried” in Paris. This is a further lie, which has been taken up by my enemies, hypocritical defenders of the rights and independence of the Jewish people who have suffered so much over the past thirty years in Russia and the Ukraine.

Can the facts be squared in any degree at all with these lies? All of the Jewish toilers of the Ukraine, as well as all other Ukrainian toilers are well aware that the movement of which I was for years the leader was a genuine revolutionary workers’ movement. At no time did that movement seek to divide the practical organization of the deceived, exploited and oppressed toilers on grounds of race. Quite the opposite: it aimed to unite them into a mighty revolutionary union capable of taking action against their oppressors, especially against the Denikinists who were dyed-in-the-wool anti-Semites. At no time did the movement make it its business to carry out pogroms against Jews nor did it ever encourage any. What is more, the vanguard of the Ukraine’s (Makhnovist) revolutionary movement contained many Jewish toilers. The Gulyai-Polye infantry regiment for instance had one company made up exclusively of two hundred Jewish toilers. There was also a four-piece artillery battery, the gunners and defense unit of which were all Jews, commander included. And there were lots of Jewish toilers in the Makhnovist movement who, for personal reasons, preferred to blend in with mixed revolutionary fighting units. These were all free fighters, volunteer enlistments who fought honestly on behalf of the joint endeavors of the toilers. These anonymous fighters had their representatives inside the economic bodies revivitualing the entire army. All of which may be verified with the Jewish colonies and villages in the Gulyai-Polye region.

All such Jewish insurgent toilers were under my command for a long period, not for days or months, but rather for entire years. All were witnesses to the manner in which 1, the Staff and the entire army conducted ourselves with regard to anti-Semitism and the pogroms that arose from it.

Every attempted pogrom or looting from our side was nipped in the bud. All found guilty of such acts were invariably shot out of hand for their misdeeds. This was the case for instance in May 1919, when some peasant insurgents from Novo-Uspenovka, on leaving the front line for some rest in the rear, came upon two decomposed corpses near a Jewish settlement: assuming these to be the corpses of insurgents murdered by members of the Jewish colony, they vented their spleen on the colony and slaughtered around thirty of its inhabitants. That same day, my Staff dispatched a commission of inquiry to the colony. It discovered the tracks of the perpetrators of the butchery. I immediately sent a special detachment to their village to place them under arrest. Those responsible for the attack on the Jewish colony, namely six individuals, one of them the Bolshevik district commissar, were all shot on 13 May 1919.

The same thing happened in July 1919, when I found myself caught in the crossfire between Denikin and Trotsky — Trotsky was then promising his Party that “it was better that the Ukraine be surrendered to Denikin in its entirety than the possibility of the Makhnovshchina’s expanding be allowed to arise” and I was forced to cross over to the right bank of the Dniepr. This was when I met with the famous Grigoriev, the ataman of the Kherson region. Misled by the inane rumors circulating about me and the insurgent movement, Grigoriev sought to conclude an alliance with me and my Staff with an eye to waging a concerted campaign against Denikin and the Bolsheviks.

Talks were opened on the condition, which I required, that, within two weeks, ataman Grigoriev furnish my Staff and the Soviet of the (Makhnovist) Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the

Ukraine with documents proving that all reports of pogroms carried out by him on two or three occasions against the Jews of Elizavetgrad were baseless, given that, with time at a premium, I was not able to authenticate them for myself.

That condition gave Grigoriev something to think about: then, as a good soldier and strategist, he consented. To prove to me that he could in no way be a pogromist, he boasted of the fact that his retinue included a Ukrainian representative of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Then, accusing me of having issued an "Appeal" against him, in the name of my Staff, wherein he had been denounced as an enemy of the revolution, in token of his good faith Grigoriev introduced to me several political representatives who attended him: Nikolai Kopornitsky of the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party, Seliansky (alias Gorobets) and Koliuzhny of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party.

This happened at a time when I was on the outskirts of Elizavetgrad with my main combat detachment. I deemed it incumbent upon me as a revolutionary to avail of this opportunity to verify for myself just what the ataman Grigoriev might have done during his occupation of the town. At the same time, some intercepted Denikinist agents revealed to me that, unbeknownst to the toilers of the Kherson region, Grigoriev was preparing to coordinate his movements with the Denikinist headquarters in a build-up to a concerted campaign against the Bolsheviks.

From inhabitants of Elizavetgrad and neighboring villages, as well as from some partisans from Grogoriev's units, I learned that every time he had occupied the town Jews had been massacred. In his presence and on his orders, his partisans had murdered nearly two thousand Jews, including the flower of the Jewish youth: many members of the anarchist, Bolshevik and socialist youth organizations. Some of these had even been taken from prison for slaughter.

Upon learning all this, I promptly declared Grigoriev, the ataman of Kherson — a "Socialist Revolutionary" (sic) — a Denikinist agent and open pogromist, directly culpable for the actions of his supporters against Jews.

At the Sentovo meeting on 27 July 1919, Grigoriev was denounced for what he was and executed on the spot for all to see. That execution and the reasons for it were announced thus: "The pogromist Grigoriev has been executed by Makhnovist leaders: Batko Makhno, Semyon Karetnik and Alexis Chubenko. The Makhnovist movement accepts full responsibility before History for this action." That declaration was endorsed by the members of the Soviet of the Insurgent Army and the Socialist Revolutionary Party members present, including Nikolai Kopornitsky (NOTE: The Social Democrats Seliansky and Koliuzhny had vanished utterly following the execution of Grigoriev.)

That was the sort of treatment I always reserved for those who had carried out pogroms or were in the throes of preparing them. And looters were not spared either, whether from the Insurgent Army's own ranks or outsiders. For example this is what happened in August 1920 when two detachments of Petliurist nationalist leanings, under the command of Levchenko and Matyansha, encircled by us, sent emissaries to us to suggest that they be incorporated into our ranks. The Staff and I received them and agreed that they could be enlisted: however, as soon as we realized that the nationalistic elements from these detachments were engaging in looting and blatant anti-Semitism, we shot them out of hand, in the village of Avereski, in Poltava province. A few days later, their commander Matyansha was also shot for his provocative behavior in the town of Zinkov (Poltava province). His detachment was stripped of its weapons and most of its members cashiered.

In December 1920, there was a repeat of this with Red Army troops, when we successfully withstood the onslaught from Budyenny's cavalry and completely routed the XIVth Division of his army, near the village of Petrovo in the Alexandrovsk district, followed by the XIVth Cavalry Division, taking the entire command and Staff prisoners in the latter instance. Many prisoners from the XIth Division expressed an interest in joining the Insurgent Army to combat the autocratic political commissars as they described them. As they were crossing the Kherson region and reached the village of Dobrovelitchka, over half of the population of which was Jewish, certain former Budyennyist or Petliurist cavalrymen, acting on the rumors current in their former units regarding the Makhnovists' hostility towards the "Yids", set about looting the homes of the Jewish villagers. As soon as this came to the attention of experienced Makhnovists, they were all arrested and shot on the spot.

Thus, throughout its entire existence, the Makhnovshchina took an uncompromising line on the anti-Semitism of pogromists: this was because it was a genuinely revolutionary toilers' movement in the Ukraine.

Nestor Makhno

From *Dyelo Truda* No 30–31, November-December 1927, pp. 15–18

## Chapter 7. In Memory of the Kronstadt Revolt

March 7<sup>th</sup> is a harrowing date for the toilers of the so-called “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” who participated in one capacity or another in the events that occurred on that date in Kronstadt. The commemoration of that date is equally painful for the toilers of all countries, for it brings back the memory of what the free workers and sailors of Kronstadt demanded of their Red executioner, the “Russian Communist Party,” and its tool, the “Soviet” government, busy doing the Russian revolution to death.

Kronstadt insisted of these statist hangmen that they hand back everything that belonged to the toilers of town and country, given that it was they who had carried out the revolution. The Kronstadtters insisted upon the practical implementation of the foundations of the October revolution:

Freely elected soviets, freedom of speech and freedom of the press for workers and peasants, anarchists and Left Socialist Revolutionaries.

The Russian Communist Party saw this as an unconscionable challenge to its monopolist position in the country and, concealing its craven executioner’s face behind the mask of revolutionary and workers’ friend, pronounced the free sailors and workers of Kronstadt counter-revolutionaries and then sent against them tens of thousands of obedient cops and slaves: Chekists, Kursanty (Red Army officer cadets — note by Alexandre Skirda), Party members ... in order to massacre these decent fighters and revolutionaries — the Kronstadtters — who had nothing with which to reproach themselves before the revolutionary masses, their only offense having been to feel outrage at the lies and cowardice of the Russian Communist Party which was trampling upon the rights of the toilers and the revolution.

On March 7, 1921, at 6.45 p.m., a storm of artillery fire was unleashed against Kronstadt. As was only natural and inevitable, Kronstadt fought back. Fought back, not just on behalf of their demands, but also on behalf of the other toilers of the country who were struggling from their revolutionary rights, arbitrarily trampled underfoot by the Bolshevik authorities.

Their fight back echoed throughout an enslaved Russia which stood ready to back their just and heroic fight, but was unfortunately powerless to do so, because it had been disarmed, constantly exploited and kept in bondage by the repressive detachments from the Red Army and the Cheka, specially formed to break the free spirit and free will of the country.

It is hard to estimate the losses suffered by the Kronstadt defenders and of the blind mass of the Red Army, but we may rest assured that they numbered upwards of ten thousand dead. For the most part, they were workers and peasants, the very people whom the Party of Lies had used in order to seize power, by gulling them with promises of a better future. It had made use of them for years exclusively in pursuit of its own party interests, so as to spread and entrench its all powerful domination over the country’s economic and political life.

Against the Bolshevik oligarchy, Kronstadt defended the very best of the workers' and peasants' struggle in the Russian revolution. For that very reason, the oligarchs exterminated the Kronstadtters, some right after the military victory, the remainder in the dungeons and blockhouses inherited from the tsarist and bourgeois regime. Understood thus, the date of March 7<sup>th</sup> has to appear as a profoundly painful anniversary for the workers of all countries. So it is not just among Russian toilers only that the painful memory of the Kronstadt revolutionaries who perished in the fighting and the survivors who were left to rot in Bolshevik jails should be reawakened on that date. But this matter will not be resolved with moaning: aside from the commemoration of March 7<sup>th</sup>, the toilers of every land should organize rallies all over the place to protest against the outrages perpetrated in Kronstadt by the Russian Communist Party against revolutionary workers and sailors, and demand the release of the survivors languishing in Bolshevik prisons and interned in the concentration camps in Finland.

*Dyelo Truda* No. 10, March 1926, pp. 3–4 .

## Chapter 8. The Idea of Equality and the Bolsheviks

The 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Russian Communist Party has roundly condemned the notion of equality. Prior to the congress, Zinoviev had mentioned the idea in the course of his polemic against Ustrialov and Bukharin. He declared then that the whole of contemporary philosophy was sustained by the idea of equality. Kalinin spoke up forcefully at the congress against that contention, taking the line that any reference to equality could not help but be harmful and was not to be tolerated. His reasoning was as follows:

‘Can we talk to peasants about equality? No, that is out of the question, for in that case, they would set about demanding the same rights as workers, which would be in complete contradiction with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Likewise, can we talk of equality to workers? No, that is out of the question too, for if, say, a communist and a non-party member do the same job, the difference resides in the former being paid twice the wage of the latter. To concede equality would allow non-party members to demand the same pay as is paid out to a communist. Is that acceptable, comrades? No, it is not. Can we call for equality among communists then? No, that is not on either, for they too occupy different positions, in terms of their rights and their material circumstances alike.’

On the basis of such considerations, Kalinin concluded that Zinoviev’s use of the term “equality” could only have been demagogic and harmful. In his reply, Zinoviev in turn told the congress that, whilst he had spoken of equality, he had meant it in quite a different sense. As for himself, all he had had in mind was “socialist equality,” that is, the equality that would one day come to pass in a more or less distant future. For the time being, until such time as the world revolution had taken place and as there was no way of knowing when it would, there could be no question of any equality. In particular, there could be no equality of rights, for that would risk dragging us in the direction of very dangerous “democratic” deviations.

This understanding on the notion of equality was not spelled out in a resolution from the congress. But, essentially, the two camps that clashed at the congress were agreed in regarding the idea of equality as intolerable.

Formerly, and not all that long ago, the Bolsheviks spoke quite a different language. It was under the banner of equality that they operated during the great Russian revolution, to overthrow the bourgeoisie, in concert with the workers and peasants, at whose expense they rose to political control over the country. It was under those colors that, after eight years of ruling over the lives and liberties of the toilers of the former Russia – henceforth to be known as the ‘Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’ the Bolshevik tsars sought to persuade the toilers of that ‘Union,’ (oppressed by them), as well as the toilers from other countries (which they do not yet control), that if they have persecuted, left to rot in prison or deported and murdered their political enemies, this

has been done exclusively in the name of the revolution, its egalitarian foundations (which they allegedly had introduced into the revolution) which their enemies supposedly wished to destroy.

It shall soon be eight years since the blood of anarchists began to flow because of their refusal to servilely bow before the violence or effrontery of those who have seized power, nor before their famously lying ideology and their utter irresponsibility.

In that criminal act, an act that cannot be described as other than a bloodlust of the Bolshevik gods, the finest offspring of the revolution have perished because they were the most loyal exponents of revolutionary ideals and because they could not be bribed into betraying them. In honestly defending the precepts of the revolution, these children of the revolution sought to fend off the madness of the Bolshevik gods and find a way out of their dead end, so as to forge a path to real freedom and genuine equality of the toilers.

The Bolshevik potentates quickly realized that the aspirations of these children of the revolution would spell doom for their madness and above all for the privileges they adroitly inherited from the toppled bourgeoisie, then treacherously beefed up to their advantage. On these grounds they condemned the revolutionaries to death. Men with the souls of slaves supported them in this and the blood flowed. For the past eight years it has gone on flowing, and in the name of what, we might ask? In the name of freedom and equality of the toilers, say the Bolsheviks, continuing to exterminate thousands of nameless revolutionaries, fighters for the social revolution, labeled as "bandits" and "counter-revolutionaries."

With that shameless falsehood, the Bolsheviks have hidden the true state of affairs in Russia from the eyes of toilers the world over, particularly their utter bankruptcy in the matter of building socialism, when this is all too apparent to all who have the eyes to see.

Anarchists alerted toilers of every country in time to the Bolsheviks' crimes in the Russian revolution. Bolshevism, embodying the ideal of a centralizing State, has shown itself as the deadly enemy of the free spirit of revolutionary toilers. Resorting to unprecedented measures, it has sabotaged the development of the revolution and besmirched the honor of its finest aspect. Successfully disguised, it concealed its real face from the gaze of the toilers, passing itself off as the champion of their interests. Only now, after an eight years' reign, increasingly flirting with the international bourgeoisie, does it begin to cast aside its mask of revolution and expose to the world of labor the face of a rapacious exploiter.

The Bolsheviks have jettisoned the idea of equality, not just in practice but also in theory, for the very enunciation of it strikes them as dangerous now. This is quite understandable, for their entire rule depends on a diametrically contrasting notion, on a screaming inequality, the entire horror and evils of which have batten upon the backs of the workers. Let us hope that the toilers of every country may draw the necessary conclusions and, in turn, finish with the Bolsheviks, those exponents of the idea of slavery and oppressors of Labor.

*Dyelo Truda* No. 9, February 1926, pp. 9-10.

## Chapter 9. The Paths of “Proletarian” Power

It is a long time now since the avant-garde socialist intelligentsia framed, in more or less rounded form, the aims of the historical struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and since proletarians, swallowing that formulation by the intelligentsia whole, entered the lists of that struggle under the intelligentsia’s leadership. There is no denying that this was a triumph for the intelligentsia which has thus set itself the target of leading the proletariat on to complete emancipation, by means of the destruction of bourgeois power and the bourgeois State, which are to be supplanted by a “proletarian” State and power.

Very naturally, neither the intelligentsia nor the proletariat itself has been stinting in its efforts and investigations designed to expose to the widest possible audience all the harm done by the bourgeois State. Thanks to which, they have been able to nurse and develop among the toiling masses the notion of a “proletarian” power that would supposedly resolve all their problems. According to this view, the proletariat, through its class power and State, would make use of the only existing means whereby it and other classes might free themselves of the bourgeoisie and introduce the principles of freedom and egalitarianism into the relations between people. Such a forecast of the destiny of “proletarian” power has always struck us anarchists as a crass error. In times gone by, our comrades constantly revolted against this notion and also demonstrated where the statist had gone wrong in differentiating between “proletarian” power and the State in general and in ascribing to the former a mission that was profoundly alien to it.

Statist socialists, however, remained true to their authoritarian tradition and it was armed with that outlook that they seized upon the Great Russian Revolution, a revolution of a depth and breadth in social implications for which History had seen no equal. As for us anarchists, we opposed their mistaken forecast about the destiny of “proletarian” power. In the course of the polemic between us, we showed the statist that any State, whether bourgeois or proletarian, tends, by its very nature, simply to exploit and oppress man, to destroy in each and every one of us all the natural qualities of the human spirit that strive for equality and for the solidarity that underpins it. Which earned us only greater hatred from the statist socialists. Now, the existence and practice of “proletarian” power in Russia have borne out and bear out the accuracy of our analysis. The “proletarian” State has increasingly betrayed its true nature and proved that its proletarian-ness was a mere figment, as proletarians have been able to appreciate since the early years of the revolution, the more so since they themselves helped install it. The fact that in the course of its degeneration the “proletarian” power has showed itself to be nothing more than a State power pure and simple is now beyond dispute and has induced it to desist from artful concealment of its real face. Its practice had abundantly proved that its goals and those of the Great Russian Revolution had absolutely nothing in common. Over all those years of hypocrisy, it has failed to subordinate the aims of the Russian Revolution to its own ends peaceably, and has had to confront all who threatened to expose its true essence — as a huge and festering ulcer upon the body of the revolution — the cowardice and treachery of which spell death and ruination to all without exception, and primarily to those who try to be independent and operate freely. One

might ask oneself: how did all of this come to pass? According to Marx and Lenin, “proletarian” power ought not to bear any resemblance at all to bourgeois power. Does not some segment of the vanguard of the proletariat bear a share of the blame for this state of affairs?

Many anarchists tend to reckon that the proletariat counts for nothing in this, having been, so to speak, duped by the caste of socialist intellectuals, who supposedly aspire, over a series of purely sociohistorical phenomena and by reason of the logic of inevitable amendments to the State, to replace the power of the bourgeoisie with their own power. It is supposedly on these grounds that the socialist intelligentsia would seek, on a permanent basis, to direct the struggle of the proletariat against the capitalist, bourgeois world.

As I see it, such an argument is neither quite accurate nor is it really adequate. Russia’s revolutionary experience supplies us with objective data galore in this connection. It shows us beyond rebuttal that the proletariat was not at all homogeneous during the revolution. Thus, the urban proletariat, whenever it participated in the overthrow of the power of the class enemy — the bourgeoisie — in many towns, hesitated for a moment between the paths of the revolutions of February and October 1917. It was only after a time, after October’s military victory over February, that a significant fraction of the urban proletariat began to throw in its lot with the part of its brothers, the direct architects of the gains of October. Soon, that segment of the proletariat not only forgot to defend those gains for itself, but also was in more of a hurry to go over to the Bolshevik party on power, which was cute enough to flatter it immoderately, cultivating in it a certain taste for class privileges, political, economic and juridical. Drinking deeply of these class privileges, this segment of the proletariat fell equally in love with its “proletarian class State.” Self-evidently, the Bolshevik social democratic party wholly supported and encouraged it in this trend, for it offered the party great scope for implementation of its own program, which consisted of utilizing the practical struggle of the proletariat so as to bring the bulk of the proletariat to heel and then take over State power in its name. Along the way, the better to stand out from the crowd, the Bolshevik social democratic party turned itself into the “Bolshevik Communist” party, unashamedly resorting to the most brazen demagogery and shrinking from no ploy, not hesitating, as the need arose, to cannibalize the programs of other political groupings: all for the sole purpose of binding the proletariat (to which it pledged its unstinting help, when in fact it was pursuing its own ends alone) all the better to itself. In this sense, the party was the finest embodiment of the historical ambitions of the intellectual caste: supplanting the bourgeoisie in power and exercising that power, no matter the cost. A sizable segment of the proletariat failed to stand up to its views: indeed, quite the opposite, it identified with what it did and became its accomplice.

That segment of the proletariat had, however, been educated over generations to the notion that the proletariat would only emancipate itself from the bourgeoisie when it managed to break its power and destroy its state organization in order to clear the way for the construction of its own. Nevertheless, this fraction of the proletariat helped the Bolshevik-Communist party to organize its “proletarian power” and erect “its” class State.

The path taken and the means employed did not take long to assimilate that fraction of the proletariat in every particular to the overthrown bourgeoisie, rendering it every whit as impudent and arrogant, with no scruples about using the most savage violence to enforce its domination over the people and the revolution.

It goes without saying that this violence was second nature to the party’s intellectual caste, for it had been schooling itself in its use for many a long year and had become intoxicated with

it. As for the bulk of the proletariat — yesterday's mute slave — the violence deployed against its fellows is wholly alien to it. Busy with the building of its "class State," part of the proletariat was thus induced to behave, through the use of violence, in a repugnant fashion with regard to the individual liberty, freedom of speech and expression of any revolutionary organization, the moment that the latter impudently took issue with "proletarian power." That fraction of the proletariat scurried to ensconce themselves, under the leadership of the Bolshevik-Communist party, in the positions left vacant by the despots of the toppled bourgeoisie, becoming in their turn a tyrannical master-class, showing no hesitation, in pursuit of these ends, about using the ghastliest violence indiscriminately against all who opposed its designs. At the same time, this behavior was artfully concealed behind the "defense of the revolution."

Such violence was employed above all against the body of the Russian revolution, for the exclusive benefit of the narrow interests of one fraction of the proletariat and of the Bolshevik-Communist party, and on behalf of their complete domination of all the other laboring classes. This cannot be regarded simply as the proletariat blown temporarily off course. Yet again, we can see very clearly how all State power brazenly shows what it is made of, with the adjective "proletarian" changing absolutely nothing.

As I see it, it is for all these reasons that all foreign comrades who have not had this first-hand experience, should carefully scrutinize all the stages of the Russian revolution, particularly the role played in it by the Bolshevik-Communist party and by that fraction of the proletariat that has followed it. This so that they may steer clear of the same errors, in the light of the shameless demagogery of the Bolsheviks and their supporters, regarding the serviceability of "proletarian power."

It is equally true that the campaign currently being waged by all our comrades against Bolshevik lies should be deployed in support of reliable information concerning anything they might themselves put to the broad masses in replacement of this "proletarian power." Fine slogans are not enough, although the masses are often not indifferent to them. This struggle is waged on the basis of concrete situations and continually leads to the posing of crucial and urgent questions: how and by which methods of social action should the toiling masses seek their complete emancipation?

Such questions should be answered as directly as possible and with the utmost clarity. That is a vital necessity, not only if an active struggle is to be conducted against the capitalist and bourgeois world, but also for our anarchist movement, for the influence of our ideas upon the launch and the outcome of that struggle hinges upon it. Which means that the proletariat must not repeat the mistake made by its brethren in Russia, which is to say, must not busy itself with the organizing of a "proletarian power" under the baton of any party, even should it label itself "proletarian," but only with seeing to the satisfaction of everyone's needs and defending the revolution against all manner of State authorities.

*Probuzdeniye* No. 18, January 1932, pp. 45-48.

# Chapter 10.“Soviet” Power – Its Present and Its Future

Many people, especially left-wing politicians, have a tendency to regard “soviet” power as a State power different from all the rest, to be sure, but painting that difference in the rosiest of hues:

“Soviet power,” they tell us, “is a worker and peasant power and, as such, has a great future ahead of it.”

There can be no more absurd assertion. “Soviet” power is a power no better and no worse than any other. Currently, it is every bit as wobbly and absurd as any State power in general. In certain respects, it is even more absurd than the rest. Having achieved total political domination over the country, it has become the unchallenged master of its economic resources and, not content with that crassly exploitative situation, it has sensed, welling up from within itself, the deceptive sentiment of a spiritual “perfection,” a sentiment that it seeks to peddle to the country’s toiling revolutionary people. This has left its proletarian “spirit” less revolutionary, but more impudent. Thus, it seeks to foist itself upon the bamboozled populace as its spiritual master: in this, it is faithful to the boundless and irresponsible effrontery of every State power. It is an open secret that this supposed “perfection” of the regime is merely the perfection of its mentor, the Bolshevik-Communist party. All of which is nothing more than a bare-faced lie, abject duplicity and criminal impudence towards the toiling masses, in whose name and thanks to whom the great Russian revolution, currently flayed by the authorities to the benefit of their party privileges and those of the proletarian minority which, under the party’s sway, believed it could identify with the labels of “proletarian” State and the dictatorship of the “proletariat,” so seductive to those who know no better, was carried out. A minority that nonetheless lets itself be dragged along by the bridle by that party, in silence, without having any say in the matter, bereft of the right to be briefed in detail about what was treacherously concocted and accomplished yesterday, and what is still being cooked up today against its proletarian brethren, the ones that refuse to be a blind, unspeaking cat’s paw and who do not swallow the lies of the party that wears a proletarian disguise.

In spite of everything, one might wonder if such conduct by the Bolshevik authorities with regard to the toilers may show itself differently in the realm of their “spiritual” education. It strikes me that that cannot but be the case. As evidence of that I would cite the persistence of revolutionary consciousness in the toilers of the USSR, a source of grave disquiet to the regime, and the fact that the Bolshevik party seeks to replace it with a political consciousness manufactured after the pattern of its program.

This is the factor that explains why Bolshevik authorities are facing more and more difficulties and why they stupidly seek to round off their economic and political despotism with a spiritual grip upon the laboring people. It goes without saying that the regime’s current straits closely

determine its future prospects: a future that is fraught with uncertainty, for want of a plainly favorable present. In fact, the present position is so visibly unfavorable for millions of workers that we may expect, any year now, bloody insurrections and revolutions erupting against the Bolshevik-Communist order. It is very obvious that the insurrectionist and revolutionary spirit of the USSR's workers should enjoy the support of any and every revolutionary. However, counter-revolutionaries and the enemies of the toilers must not make capital out of that support. Consequently, that support should have no aim other than the destruction of the present senseless and irresponsible order, set up for the benefit of the privileges of party members and their hirelings.

The lunacy of this regime must be eliminated and replaced by the vital principles of the exploited workers, on a basis of solidarity, freedom and equal voice for each and every person, in short, for all concerned with genuine emancipation. This is a matter that concerns all Russian revolutionaries: all who find themselves exiles or inside the USSR must, as I see it, concern themselves with it first of all: as well as all proletarians and intellectuals of revolutionary disposition: to whom I would add all opponents of, and political fugitives from the Bolshevik regime, provided that it be for truly revolutionary considerations.

That is how I see the present and the future of "soviet power," as well as the stance that Russian revolutionaries of all persuasions must adopt with regard to it. In my view, revolutionaries cannot pose the problem differently. They must appreciate that, if Bolshevik power is to be fought, one has to be able to boast in the greatest measure the values that it used and enunciated in order to seize power: values that it still professes, moreover, to champion, albeit without sincerity.

Otherwise, the struggle of revolutionaries would turn out to be, if not counter-revolutionary, then at least of no use to the cause of millions of toilers gulled, oppressed and exploited by the Bolshevik-Communists, toilers that a revolutionary should be helping, whatever the cost, to break free of the vicious circle of falsehood and oppression.

*Bor'ba (The Struggle)* Paris, No. 19–20, 25 October 1931, W-2-3

[This paper was published by a number of anti-Stalinist and anti-Trotskyist Soviet defectors, who distanced themselves from the Bolshevik regime on a basis of reversion to the power of the free soviets of 1917 and the demands of the Kronstadt rebels of 1921. The leading light behind the magazine was Gregory Bessedovsky, a Ukrainian former soviet diplomat who quit the USSR's Paris embassy sensationally and devoted himself to violent denunciation of the corruption of the Stalinist regime. See his book *Oui, J'accuse!* Paris, 1930 — Note by Alexandre Skirda]

# Chapter 11. The Struggle Against the State

The fact that the modern State is the organizational form of an authority founded upon arbitrariness and violence in the social life of toilers is independent of whether it may be “bourgeois” or “proletarian.” It relies upon oppressive centralism, arising out of the direct violence of a minority deployed against the majority. In order to enforce and impose the legality of its system, the State resorts not only to the gun and money, but also to potent weapons of psychological pressure. With the aide of such weapons, a tiny group of politicians enforces psychological repression of an entire society, and, in particular, of the toiling masses, conditioning them in such a way as to divert their attention from the slavery instituted by the State.

So it must be clear that if we are to combat the organized violence of the modern State, we have to deploy powerful weapons, appropriate to the magnitude of the task.

Thus far, the methods of social action employed by the revolutionary working class against the power of the oppressors and exploiters — the State and Capital — in conformity with libertarian ideas, were insufficient to lead the toilers on to complete victory.

It has come to pass in History that the workers have defeated Capital, but the victory then slipped from their grasp, because some State power emerged, amalgamating the interests of private capital and those of State capitalism for the sake of success over the toilers.

The experience of the Russian revolution has blatantly exposed our shortcomings in this regard. We must not forget that, but should rather apply ourselves to identifying those shortcomings plainly.

We may acknowledge that our struggle against the State in the Russian revolution was remarkable, despite the disorganization by which our ranks were afflicted: remarkable above all insofar as the destruction of that odious institution is concerned.

But, by contrast, our struggle was insignificant in the realm of construction of the free society of toilers and its social structures, which might have ensured that it prospered beyond reach of the tutelage of the State and its repressive institutions.

The fact that we libertarian communists or anarcho-syndicalists failed to anticipate the sequel to the Russian revolution and that we failed to make haste to devise new forms of social activity in time, led many of our groups and organizations to dither yet again in their political and socio-strategic policy on the fighting front of the Revolution.

If we are to avert a future relapse into these same errors, when a revolutionary situation comes about, and in order to retain the cohesion and coherence of our organizational line, we must first of all amalgamate all of our forces into one active collective, then without further ado, define our constructive conception of economic, social, local and territorial units, so that they are outlined in detail (free soviets), and in particular describe in broad outline their basic revolutionary mission in the struggle against the State. Contemporary life and the Russian revolution require that.

Those who have blended in with the very ranks of the worker and peasant masses, participating actively in the victories and defeats of their campaign, must without doubt come to our own conclusions, and more specifically to an appreciation that our struggle against the State must

be carried on until the State has been utterly eradicated: they will also acknowledge that the toughest role in that struggle is the role of the revolutionary armed force.

It is essential that the action of the Revolution's armed forces be linked with the social and economic unit, wherein the laboring people will organize itself from the earliest days of the revolution onwards, so that total self-organization of life may be introduced, out of reach of all statist structures.

From this moment forth, anarchists must focus their attention upon that aspect of the Revolution. They have to be convinced that, if the revolution's armed forces are organized into huge armies or into lots of local armed detachments, they cannot but overcome the State's incumbents and defenders, and thereby bring about the conditions needed by the toiling populace supporting the revolution, so that it may cut all ties with the past and look to the final detail of the process of constructing a new socioeconomic existence.

The State will, though, be able to cling to a few local enclaves and try to place multifarious obstacles in the path of the toilers' new life, slowing the pace of growth and harmonious development of new relationships founded on the complete emancipation of man.

The final and utter liquidation of the State can only come to pass when the struggle of the toilers is oriented along the most libertarian lines possible, when the toilers will themselves determine the structures of their social action. These structures should assume the form of organs of social and economic self-direction, the form of free "anti-authoritarian" soviets. The revolutionary workers and their vanguard — the anarchists — must analyze the nature and structure of these soviets and specify their revolutionary functions in advance. It is upon that, chiefly, that the positive evolution and development of anarchist ideas in the ranks of those who will accomplish the liquidation of the State on their own account in order to build a free society, will be dependent.

*Dyelo Truda* No.17, October 1926, pp. 5-6

## **Chapter 12. The First of May: Symbol of a New Era in the Life and Struggle of the Toilers**

In the socialist world, the first of May is considered the Labor holiday. This is a mistaken description that has so penetrated the lives of the toilers that in many countries that day is indeed celebrated as such. In fact, the first of May is not at all a holiday for the toilers. No, the toilers should not stay in their workshops or in the fields on that date. On that date, toilers all over the world should come together in every village, every town, and organize mass rallies, not to mark that date as statist socialists and especially the Bolsheviks conceive it, but rather to gauge the measure of their strength and assess the possibilities for direct armed struggle against a rotten, cowardly, slave-holding order rooted in violence and falsehood. It is easiest for all the toilers to come together on that historic date, already part of the calendar, and most convenient for them to express their collective will, as well as enter into common discussion of everything related to essential matters of the present and the future.

Over forty years ago, the American workers of Chicago and its environs assembled on the first of May. There they listened to addresses from many socialist orators, and more especially those from anarchist orators, for they fairly gobbled up libertarian ideas and openly sided with the anarchists.

That day those American workers attempted, by organizing themselves, to give expression to their protest against the iniquitous order of the State and Capital of the propertied. That was what the American libertarians Spies, Parsons and others spoke about. It was at this point that this protest rally was interrupted by provocations by the hirelings of Capital and it ended with the massacre of unarmed workers, followed by the arrest and murder of Spies, Parsons and other comrades.

The workers of Chicago and district had not assembled to celebrate the May Day holiday. They had gathered to resolve, in common, the problems of their lives and their struggles.

Today too, wheresoever the toilers have freed themselves from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie and the social democracy linked to it (Menshevik or Bolshevik, it makes no difference) or even try to do so, they regard the first of May as the occasion of a get-together when they will concern themselves with their own affairs and consider the matter of their emancipation. Through these aspirations, they give expression to their solidarity with and regard for the memory of the Chicago martyrs. Thus they sense that the first of May cannot be a holiday for them. So, despite the claims of "professional socialists," tending to portray it as the Feast of Labor, the first of May can be nothing of the sort for conscious workers.

The first of May is the symbol of a new era in the life and struggle of the toilers, an era that each year offers the toilers fresh, increasingly tough and decisive battles against the bourgeoisie, for the freedom and independence wrested from them, for their social ideal.

*Dyelo Truda* No.36, 1928, p. 2-3.

## Chapter 13. Anarchism and Our Times

Anarchism is not merely a doctrine that treats of man's social life, in the narrow meaning with which the term is invested in political dictionaries, and sometimes, at meetings, by our propagandist speakers. It is also a teaching that embraces the whole existence of man as a rounded individual.

Over the course of the elaboration of its overall world picture, anarchism has set itself a very specific task: to encompass the world in its entirety, sweeping aside all manner of obstacles, present and yet to come, which might be posed by bourgeois capitalist science and technology. This with the aim of supplying man with the most exhaustive possible explanation of existence in this world and of making the best possible fist of all the problems which may confront it: this approach should help it to internalize a consciousness of the anarchism naturally inherent in it — that, at least, is what I suppose — to the extent that it is continually being faced with partial manifestations thereof.

It is on the basis of the will of the individual that the libertarian teaching can be embodied in real life and clear a path that will help man to banish all spirit of submission from his bosom.

When it develops, anarchism knows no bounds. It acknowledges no banks within which it might be confined and fixed. Just like human existence, it has no definitive formulas for its aspirations and objectives.

As I see it, the right that every man enjoys to total freedom, as defined by the theoretical postulates of anarchism, could only be, for him, a means through which to achieve more or less complete blossoming, whilst continuing to develop. Having banished from man that spirit of submission that has been artificially thrust upon him, anarchism thereafter becomes the keynote idea of human society on its march towards the attainment of all its goals.

In our times, anarchism is still regarded as theoretically weak: furthermore, some argue that it is often interpreted wrongly. However, its exponents have plenty to say about it: many are constantly prattling about it, militating actively and sometimes complaining of its lack of success (I imagine, in this last instance, that this attitude is prompted by the failure to devise, through research, the social wherewithal vital to anarchism if it is to gain a foothold in contemporary society) ...

Each and every one of us is agreed that cohesion between all active anarchists, in the form of a serious collective activity, is what is needed. It would, therefore, be very surprising for opponents of that Union in our ranks to declare themselves. The issue to be resolved relates only to the organizational format that such a Union of anarchists might assume.

Personally, I am inclined to accept as the most appropriate and most necessary organizational format the one that would offer itself as a Union of anarchists constructed on the basis of the principles of collective discipline and concerted direction of all anarchist forces. Thus, all organizations affiliating to it would be inter-connected not just by a community of socio-revolutionary goals, but also by a common subscription to the means that would lead us there.

The activities of local organizations can be adapted, as far as possible, to suit local conditions: however, such activities must, unfailingly, be consonant with the pattern of the overall organizational practice of the Union of anarchists covering the whole country.

Whether this Union describes itself as a party or as something else is a matter of merely secondary importance. The essential point is that it should focus all anarchist forces upon uniform and common practice against the enemy, pressing ahead with the struggle for toilers' rights, implementation of the social revolution and the installation of the anarchist society!

*Dyelo Truda* No. 6, November 1925, pp. 6-7.

# Chapter 14. Our Organization

The times through which the working class world-wide is presently passing requires that revolutionary anarchists strain their imaginations and their energies to the fullest if they are to clarify the most important issues.

Those of our comrades who played an active part in the Russian revolution and who have kept faith with their convictions will be sensible of the harmfulness that absence of solid organization has brought to our movement. Those comrades are well-placed to render particular service to the quest for union currently being conducted. It has not gone unnoticed by those comrades, I imagine, that anarchism was a factor for insurrection among the toiling revolutionary masses in Russia and in the Ukraine: it incited them to join in the struggle everywhere. However, the absence of a great specifically anarchist organization, capable of marshaling its resources against the revolution's enemies, left it powerless to assume any organizational role. The libertarian thrust in the revolution has suffered the dire consequences of that.

If they have grasped that shortcoming, the Russian and Ukrainian anarchists should not permit a repetition of this phenomenon. The lesson of the past is too painful and, bearing that in mind, they ought to be the first to teach by example through the cohesiveness of their forces. How? By setting up an organization that can accomplish anarchism's missions, not just when the social revolution is being hatched, but also in its wake. Such an organization should unite all of anarchism's revolutionary forces and unhesitatingly set about preparing the masses for the social revolution and the struggle to achieve the anarchist society.

Although the majority of us are alive to the necessity of such an organization, it is regrettable that we have to record that there is only a tiny number prepared to tackle it with the commitment and consistency that are indispensable.

At the moment, events are gathering pace throughout Europe as a whole and that includes Russia, enmeshed though she may be in the nets of the Pan-Bolsheviks. The day is not far off when we will again be called upon to take an active part in these events. If we answer the call again without first having equipped ourselves with an adequate organization, we will still be powerless to preclude events from being sucked into the vortex of statist systems.

Wheresoever human life is to be found, anarchism assumes a concrete existence. On the other hand, it becomes accessible to the individual only where it boasts propagandists and militants, who have honestly and entirely severed their connections with the slave mentality of our age, something, by the way, that brings savage persecution down upon their heads. Such militants aspire to serve their beliefs with disinterest, without fearing to uncover unsuspected aspects in the course of their development, the better to digest them as they proceed, if need be, and in this way they labor for the success of the anarchist spirit over the spirit of submission. Two theses arise out of the above:

- the first is that anarchism assumes multifarious expressions and forms, whilst retaining a perfect integrity in its essentials.

- the second is that it is inherently revolutionary and can adopt only revolutionary modes of struggle against its enemies.

In the course of its revolutionary struggle, anarchism not merely overthrows governments and discards their laws, but also sets about the society that spawned their values, their “mores” and their “morality,” which is what makes it increasingly comprehensible and digestible to the oppressed portion of mankind.

All of which inclines us to the firm belief that anarchism can no longer remain walled up inside the narrow parameters of a marginal thinking to which only a few tiny groups operating in isolation subscribe. Its natural influence upon the mentality of struggling human groups is all too apparent. If that influence is to be assimilated in a conscious fashion, it must henceforth equip itself with new approaches and start here and now to borrow the approach of social practices.

*Dyelo Truda* No. 4, September 1925, pp. 7-8.

# Chapter 15. On Revolutionary Discipline

Some comrades have put the following question to me: How do I conceive revolutionary discipline? Let me answer that.

I take revolutionary discipline to mean the self-discipline of the individual, set in the context of a strictly prescribed collective activity equally incumbent upon all.

This should be the responsible policy line of the members of that collective, leading to strict congruence between its practice and its theory.

Without discipline inside the organization, there is no way of undertaking any consequential revolutionary activity at all. In the absence of discipline, the revolutionary vanguard cannot exist, for in that case it would find itself in utter disarray in its practice and would be incapable of identifying the tasks of the moment or of living up to the initiator role that the masses expect of it.

I envisage this question against the backdrop of observation and experience of consistent revolutionary practice. For my part, I take as my basis the experience of the Russian revolution, which bore within it a content that was essentially libertarian in many respects.

Had anarchists been closely connected in organizational terms and had they in their actions abided strictly by a well-defined discipline, they would never have suffered such a rout. But, because the anarchists “of all persuasions and tendencies” did not represent (not even in their specific groups) a homogeneous collective with a well-defined policy of action, for that very reason, these anarchists were unable to withstand the political and strategic scrutiny which revolutionary circumstances imposed upon them. Disorganization reduced them to political impotence, separating them into two categories: the first made up of those who hurled themselves into systematic occupation of bourgeois properties, where they set up house and lived in comfort. These are the ones I term “tourists,” the various anarchists who beetled around from town to town, in hope of stumbling across a place to live for a time along the way, taking their leisure and hanging around as long as possible to live in comfort and ease.

The other category was made up of those who severed all real connections with anarchism (although a few of them inside the USSR are now passing themselves off as the sole representatives of revolutionary anarchism) and fairly swooped upon the positions offered them by the Bolsheviks, even when the authorities were shooting anarchists who remained true to their revolutionary credentials by denouncing the Bolsheviks’ treachery.

In the light of these facts, it will be readily understood why I cannot remain indifferent to the nonchalance and negligence currently to be encountered in our circles.

For one thing, it prevents the establishment of a coherent libertarian collective that would allow anarchists to assume their rightful place in the revolution, and, for another, it leads to a situation where we make do with fine words and grand ideas, whilst fading away when the time for action comes.

That is why I am speaking about a libertarian organization that rests upon the principle of fraternal discipline. Such an organization would lead to the crucial understanding between all of

the living forces of revolutionary anarchism and would assist it in taking its rightful place in the struggle of Labor against Capital.

In this fashion, libertarian ideas can only gain a mass following, and not be impoverished. Only empty-headed, irresponsible chatter-boxes could balk at such an organizational set-up.

Organizational responsibility and discipline should not be controversial: they are the traveling companions of the practice of social anarchism.

*Dyelo Truda* No. 7-8, December 1925-January 1926, p.6.

# Chapter 16. The ABC of the Revolutionary Anarchist

Anarchism means man living free and working constructively. It means the destruction of everything that is directed against man's natural, healthy aspirations.

Anarchism is not exclusively a theoretical teaching emanating from programs artificially conceived with an eye to the regulation of life: it is a teaching derived from life across all its wholesome manifestations, skipping over all artificial criteria.

The social and political visage of anarchism is a free, anti-authoritarian society, one that enshrines freedom, equality and solidarity between all its members.

In anarchism, Right means the responsibility of the individual, the sort of responsibility that brings with it an authentic guarantee of freedom and social justice for each and for all, in all places and at all times. It is out of this that communism springs.

Anarchism is naturally innate in man: communism is the logical extrapolation from it.

These assertions require theoretical support in the shape of assistance from scientific analysis and concrete facts, so that they may become fundamental postulates of anarchism. However, the great libertarian theorists, like Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Johann Most, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Sébastien Faure and lots of others were, I suppose at any rate, loath to confine their doctrine within rigid, definitive parameters. Quite the opposite. It might be said that anarchism's scientific dogma is the aspiration to demonstrate that it is inherent in human nature never to rest on its laurels. The only thing that is unchanging in scientific anarchism is its natural tendency to reject all fetters and any attempt by man to exploit his fellow men. In place of the fetters of the slavery currently extant in human society which, by the way, socialism has not done away with, nor can it – anarchism plants freedom and man's inalienable right to make use of that freedom.

As a revolutionary anarchist, I shared the life of the Ukrainian people during the revolution. Throughout its activity, that people instinctively felt the vital attraction of libertarian ideas and, equally, paid the tragic price for that. Without yielding, I tasted the same dramatic rigors of that collective struggle but, very often, I found myself powerless to comprehend and then to articulate the demands of the moment. Generally speaking, I quickly came to my senses and I clearly grasped that the goal for which I and my comrades were calling for struggle was readily assimilated by the masses fighting for the freedom and independence of the individual and of mankind as a whole.

Experience of practical struggle strengthened my conviction that anarchism educates man in a living way. It is a teaching every bit as revolutionary as life, and it is as varied and potent in its manifestations as man's creative existence and, indeed, is intimately bound up with that.

As a revolutionary anarchist, and for as long as I retain even the most tenuous connection with that label, I will summon you, my humiliated brother, to the struggle to make a reality of the anarchist ideal. In fact, it is only through that struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you will reach an understanding of anarchism.

So, anarchism is present in man naturally: historically, it liberates him from the (artificially acquired) slave mentality and helps him become a conscious fighter against slavery in all its guises. It is in that regard that anarchism is revolutionary.

The more a man becomes aware, through reflection, of his servile condition, the more indignant he becomes, the more the anarchist spirit of freedom, determination and action waxes inside him. That is true of every individual, man or woman, even though they may never have heard of the word "anarchism" before.

The nature of man is anarchist: it kicks against anything tending to make it a prisoner. As I see it, this, man's natural essence, is well expressed by the scientific term anarchism. The latter, as an ideal of life in men, plays a meaningful role in human evolution. The oppressors as much as the oppressed, begin, little by little, to come alive to that role: so the former aspire by hook or by crook to misrepresent that ideal, whilst the latter aspire to make it the easier to attain.

Comprehension of the anarchist ideal grows in slave and master alike as modern civilization grows.

Despite the ends to which the latter has thus far been turned — lulling and thwarting every natural tendency in man to protest every trespass against his dignity — it has not been able to silence independent scientific minds which have exposed the true provenance of man and demonstrated the nonexistence of God, hitherto considered the Creator of Mankind. Thereafter, it has naturally become easier to offer irrefutable proof of the artificial nature of "divine ordinances" on earth and of the ignominious relations that they establish between men.

All of these happenings have been of considerable assistance to the conscious development of anarchist ideas. Equally it is true that artificial notions have come to light at the same time: liberalism and that allegedly "scientific" socialism, one of the branches of which is represented by Bolshevism-Communism. However, despite all their vast influence upon the psychology of modern society, or at any rate upon a large part thereof, and despite their victory over the classical reaction on the one hand, and over the individual personality on the other, these artificial notions tend to slip down the slope leading to the familiar forms of the old world.

The free man, who achieves consciousness and expresses it around himself, inevitably lays to rest and always will lay to rest, the whole of mankind's ignoble past, as well as all that that implied in terms of deceit, arbitrary violence and degradation. It will also lay these artificial teachings to rest.

From this moment forth, the individual little by little struggles free of the carapace of lies and cowardice in which the earthly gods have wrapped him since birth, and that with the aid of the brute force of bayonet, ruble, "justice" and hypocritical science — the science of the sorcerers' apprentices.

In sloughing off such infamy, the individual attains a completeness that opens his eyes to the map of the world: and the first thing he remarks is his servile former existence, replete with cowardice and misery. In making a slave of him, that former existence had done to death everything clean, pure and worthwhile that he had started life with, so as to turn him either into a bleating sheep, or an imbecilic master who tramples and destroys anything good to be encountered in himself or in others.

It is at this point only that man awakes to natural freedom, independent of everyone and everything which reduces to ashes anything that defies it, everything that violates nature's purity and captivating beauty, which is made manifest and grows through the autonomous creative endeavor of the individual. It is here only that the individual comes to his senses again and

damns his shameful past for once and for all, severing every psychic link with it that hitherto imprisoned his individual and social life with the burden of its servile ascendancy and also, partly, through his own resignation, as encouraged and deceived by the shamans of science.

Henceforth, man makes as much progress from year to year towards a lofty ethical goal — not to be and not to become a shaman himself, some prophet of power over others and no longer to tolerate others wielding power over him — as formerly he was making from generation to generation.

Freed from his heavenly and earthly deities, as well as from all their moral and social prescriptions, man speaks out against and offers actual opposition to man's exploitation of his fellow man and the perversion of his nature, which remains invariably committed to the onward march towards completion and perfection. This rebel, having become conscious of himself and of the circumstances of his oppressed and degraded brethren, thereafter gives expression to his heart and to his reason: he becomes a revolutionary anarchist, the only individual capable of thirsting after freedom, completion and perfection for himself and for the human race, as he tramples underfoot the slavery and social idiocy which has, historically, been embodied by violence — the State. Against that murderer and that organized bandit, the free man in turn organizes along with his fellows, so as to strengthen and espouse a genuinely communist policy in all the common gains made along the road of creation, which is at once grandiose and painful.

The individual members of such groups, by dint of becoming members of them, free themselves from the criminal tutelage of the ruling society, to the extent that they rediscover themselves, that is, they reject all servility towards others, whatever they may have been hitherto: worker, peasant, student or intellectual. In this way they escape from the condition either of a pack-mule, slave, functionary or lackey selling themselves to imbeciles of masters.

As an individual, man gets back to his authentic personality when he rejects false thinking about life and reduces it to ashes, thereby recovering his real rights. It is through this dual operation of rejection and affirmation that the individual becomes a revolutionary anarchist and a conscious communist.

As an ideal of human existence, anarchism is consciously disclosed to each individual as thought's natural aspiration to a free and creative existence, leading on to a social ideal of happiness. In our day, the anarchist society or harmonious human society no longer seems a chimera. However, like its elaboration and its practical planning, the conception of it seems as yet little in evidence.

As a teaching bearing upon man's new life and its creative development, individually as well as socially, the very idea of anarchism is founded upon the indestructible truth of human nature and on the incontrovertible proofs of the injustice of contemporary society — a veritable permanent blight. Realization of that leads to its advocates — anarchists — finding themselves in conditions of semi- or complete outlawry vis-à-vis the formal institutions of the existing society. Indeed, anarchism cannot be acknowledged as quite lawful in any country: this can be explained in terms of present society's being profoundly impregnated by its servant and master, the State. That band of individuals which has always lived as a parasite upon mankind, by cutting its life up into "slices," has thus identified itself with the State. Whether individually or as a countless mass, man finds himself at the mercy of this band of drones going under the name of "governors and masters," when in reality they are nothing but straightforward exploiters and oppressors.

The great idea of anarchism is not at all to the taste of these sharks who brutalize and enslave the contemporary world, whether they are governments of right or left, bourgeois or statist so-

cialists. The difference between these sharks boils down to the fact that the former are professedly bourgeois — and thus less hypocritical — whereas the latter, the statist socialists of all shades, and among them especially the collectivists who have illegitimately tacked on the label of “communists,” namely, the Bolsheviks, hypocritically hide behind the watchwords of “fraternity and equality.” The Bolsheviks are ready to give the present society a thousand coats of paint or re-label the systems of domination for some and enslavement for others a thousand times over — in short, to amend the names as their programs may require, without thereby altering the nature of the present society by one iota, even if it means incorporating into their stupid programs compromises between the natural contradictions that exist between domination and servitude. Although they know that these contradictions are insurmountable, they cling to them regardless, for the sole purpose of not letting appear in life the only truly human ideal: libertarian communism.

According to their absurd programs, the statist socialists and communists have decided to “allow” man to emancipate himself socially, without its thereby being feasible for him to manifest that freedom in his social life. As for leaving man to emancipate himself completely, spiritually, in such a way that he may be wholly free to act and to submit only to his own will and the laws of nature alone, although they touch upon that subject, that is out of the question as far as they are concerned. This is the reason why they join their efforts to those of the bourgeois, so that emancipation may never elude their odious supervision. In any event, we know only too well the form that may be taken by “emancipation” awarded by any political authorities.

The bourgeois finds it natural to speak of the toilers as slaves fated to remain such. He will never give encouragement to authentic labor likely to produce something genuinely useful and beautiful, something of benefit to the whole of mankind. Despite the vast capital resources at his disposal in industry and agriculture, he claims not to be able to devise the principles of a novel social existence. The present seems quite adequate to him, for all the powerful kowtow to him: tsars, presidents, governments and virtually all intellectuals and scholars, all who in their turn reduce the slaves of the new society to subjection. “Servants!” the bourgeois cry out to their faithful servitors, “Give to the slaves the pittance which is their due, keep what is due to you for your devoted services, then hold the remainder for us!” In conditions like those, life for them could not be anything other than beautiful! — No, we are not in agreement with you on the above! retort the state socialists and communists. Whereupon they turn to the workers, organizing them into political parties, then inciting them to revolt whilst exhorting them as follows:

Drive out the bourgeois from State power and give it to us statist socialists and communists, then we will defend you and set you free.

Bitter, natural enemies of State authority, more than of the drones and privileged, the toilers give vent to their hatred, rise in revolt, carry out the revolution, destroy the power of the State and drive out those wielding it, and then, either through naiveté or lack of vigilance, they let the socialists lay hands on it. In Russia, they let the Bolshevik-Communists lay hands on it like that. These craven Jesuits, these monsters, butchers of freedom, thereupon set to work to strangle, shoot and crush the people, even though they were unarmed, just as the bourgeois had done before them, if not indeed worse. They shot to break the independent spirit, whether collective or individual, in the aim of eradicating once and for all from man the spirit of freedom and the will to create, to leave him a spiritual slave and physical lackey to a band of villains ensconced in place of the toppled throne, and not hesitating to deploy killers to bring the masses to heel and eliminate the recalcitrant.

Man groans underneath the weight of the chains of socialist power in Russia. He groans in other countries also beneath the yoke of socialists in cahoots with the bourgeoisie, or even under the yoke of the bourgeoisie alone. Everywhere, individually or collectively, man groans under the oppressiveness of State power and its political and economic lunacies. Few people take an interest in his sufferings without simultaneously having second thoughts, for the executioners, old or new, are spiritually and physically very robust: they can call upon huge effective resources to underpin their hold and crush each and every person who stands in their way.

Itching to defend his rights to life, liberty and happiness, man seeks to manifest his creative determination by venturing into the maelstrom of violence. In face of the uncertain outcome of his fight, he sometimes has a tendency to lower his arms in front of his executioner, at the very moment when the latter is slipping the noose about his neck, and this when just one bold glance from him would be enough to reduce the executioner to a quivering jelly and call the burdensome yoke once more into question. Unfortunately, man very often prefers to close his eyes at the very moment when the executioner is slipping a noose around his entire life.

Only the man who has successfully rid himself of the chains of oppression and seen all the horrors being perpetrated against the human race can be persuaded that his freedom and that of his neighbor are inviolable, as are their lives, and that his neighbor is his brother. If he is ready to conquer and defend his freedom, to exterminate every oppressor and every executioner (unless the latter renounces his craven trade) then, provided he does not set himself the target in this struggle against the evils of contemporary society of replacing bourgeois power with some other, equally oppressive power — be it socialist, communist or “worker” (Bolshevik) — but rather aims to achieve a really free society, organized on a basis of individual responsibility and guaranteeing all a genuine freedom and equality of social justice for all, that man only is a revolutionary anarchist. He may without fear look upon the works of the executioner-State and, if need be, listen to his verdict, and also pronounce his own by declaring:

No, it need not be so! Revolt, oppressed brother! Rise up against all State power! Destroy the power of the bourgeoisie and do not replace it with that of the socialists and Bolshevik-communists. Do away with all State power and drive out its champions, for you will never find friends among them.

The power of the statist socialists or communists is every bit as noxious as that of the bourgeoisie. It may even be more so, when it conducts its experiments with the blood and the lives of men. At this point, it does not take long to revert surreptitiously to the premises of bourgeois power: it no longer has any fears about having recourse to the worst of means, lying and deceiving even more than any other power. The ideas of socialism or State communism become redundant: it no longer avails of them, laying hands instead upon any which might help it to cling to power. In the last analysis, it merely uses new means to perpetuate domination and become more cowardly than the bourgeoisie which strings the revolutionary up in public view whilst Bolshevism-communism murders and strangles on the sly.

Any political revolution which has left the bourgeoisie and the state socialists or communists to fight it out is a good illustration of what I have just been saying, especially if one considers the examples of the Russian revolutions of February and October 1917. Having overthrown the Russian empire, the toiling masses consequently felt themselves to be half-liberated politically and sought to complete their liberation. They set about transferring the land confiscated from the great landlords and the clergy to those who worked it or indeed intended to do so without exploitation of another man’s labor. In the towns, it was the factories, workshops, printing-works

and other social enterprises that were taken in hand by those who worked there. Embroiled in these healthy and enthusiastic endeavors, designed to institute fraternal relations between town and country, the toilers omitted to notice that new governments were being installed in Kiev, Kharkov and Petrograd.

Through its class organizations, the people yearned to lay the foundations of a new, free society intended, as it develops without interference, to eliminate from the body of society all the parasites and all the power exercised by some over others, these being deemed by the toilers to be stupid and harmful.

This approach clearly made headway in the Ukraine, in the Urals and in Siberia. In Tiflis, Kiev, Petrograd and Moscow, in the very heart of the moribund authorities, a similar tendency surfaced. However, always and everywhere, the state socialists and communists had, and still have, supporters aplenty, as well as their hired killers. Among the latter, sad to say, there were also many workers. Abetted by these paid killers, the Bolshevik-Communists put paid to the people's endeavors and in a manner so terrible that even the Medieval Inquisition might feel envious of them!

As for ourselves, knowing the nature of all State power, we told the socialist and Bolshevik leaders:

Shame on you! You have written and talked so much about the ferocity of the bourgeoisie towards the oppressed. You have been so zealous in your defense of the revolutionary purity and commitment of the toilers struggling for their emancipation and now, having come into power, you turn out to be either the same cowardly lackeys of the bourgeoisie or have become bourgeois yourselves through recourse to its methods, to the extreme that the bourgeoisie stands astounded and pokes fun at you.

Moreover, through the experiences of Bolshevism-Communism, the bourgeoisie has been brought to a realization, in recent years, that the "scientific" chimera of a state socialism proved unable to cope without its methods and indeed, itself. It has grasped the point so well that it pokes fun at its pupils who cannot even live up to its example. It has realized that in the socialist system, the exploitation and organized violence against the bulk of the laboring population do nothing to do away with the debauched life-style and parasitism of the drones, that in fact the exploitation suffers only a name change before growing and being redoubled. And this is what the facts bear out for us. One has only to register the Bolsheviks' rapaciousness and their monopolization of all the revolutionary gains of the people, as well as their police, courts, prisons and armies of jailers, all of them deployed against the revolution. The "red" army continues to be recruited by force! In it one finds the same ranks as before, albeit now given different labels, but even more unaccountable and overbearing.

Liberalism, socialism and State communism are three branches of the same family, resorting to different approaches in order to exercise their power over man, with a view to preventing him from growing fully in the direction of freedom and independence through the devising of a new, wholesome, genuine principle rooted in a social ideal valid for the whole human race.

Rebel! the revolutionary anarchist exhorts the oppressed. Rise up and eradicate all power over you and within you. And have no truck with the establishment of any new power over others. Be free and defend the freedom of others against all trespass!

In human society, power is particularly exalted by those who have never really lived by their own labor and a wholesome existence, or indeed who no longer live by it or have no wish to live by it. The power of the State will never deliver joy, happiness and fulfillment to any soci-

ety. Such power was created by drones for the sole purpose of pillage and indulgence of their often murderous violence against those who do produce, through their toil — whether through determination, intelligence or brawn — everything useful and good in man's life.

Whether that power styles itself bourgeois, socialist or Bolshevik-Communist or worker-peasant power, it all comes down to the same thing: it is every whit as damaging to a wholesome and happy individual as it is to society at large. The nature of all State power is everywhere identical: it tends to annihilate the freedom of the individual, turning him, spiritually, into a slave, and physically into a lackey, before putting him to use for the filthiest tasks. There is no such thing as harmless power.

Oppressed brother, banish all power from within you and do not allow any to be established either over you or over your brother, be he near or far!

The really wholesome, joyous life of the individual or group is not built up with the aid of power and programs that seek to enclose it within artificial constructs and written laws. No, it can only be constructed on a basis of individual freedom and its independent creative endeavor, making headway through phases of destruction and construction.

The freedom of every individual is the foundation of the libertarian society: the latter attains wholeness through decentralization and the realization of a common objective: libertarian communism.

Whenever we think of the libertarian communist society, we see it as a grandiose society, harmonious in its human relationships. It is chiefly dependent upon the free individuals banded together into affinity groupings — whether prompted by interest, need or inclination — guaranteeing an equal measure of social justice for all and linking up into federations and confederations.

Libertarian communism is a society that is rooted in the free life of every man, in his untouchable entitlement to infinite development, the elimination of all injustices and all the evils that have hobbled society's progress and perfectibility by splitting it into strata and classes, sources of man's oppression and violence towards his fellow man.

The libertarian society sets itself the target of making everyone's life more beautiful and more radiant, through his labor, his determination and his intellect. In full accord with nature, libertarian communism is, consequently, founded upon man's life made wholly fulfillment, independent, creative and absolutely free. For that reason its adepts appear to live the lives of free and radiant beings.

Labor, universally fraternal relations, love of life, the passion for free creation of beauty, all these values animate the life and activity of the libertarian communists. They have no need of prisons, executioners, spies and provocateurs, whom the statist socialists and communists employ in such huge numbers. As a matter of principle, the libertarian communists have no need for the hired brigands and killers of which the prime example and supreme chief is, in the last analysis, the State. Oppressed brother! Prepare yourself for the establishment of that society, through reflection and organized action. Except, just remember that your organization must be solid and consistent in its social activity. The sworn enemy of your emancipation is the State: it is best embodied by the union of these five stereotypes: the property-owner, the soldier, the judge, the priest and the one who serves them all, the intellectual. In most instances, the last-named of these takes it upon himself to demonstrate the "legitimate" entitlement of his four masters to punish the human race, regulate man's life in its every individual and social aspect, and in so doing, distorting the meaning of the natural law in order to codify "historical and juridical" laws, the criminal outpourings of pen-pushers on a retainer.

The enemy is very strong because, for centuries past, he has made his living from rapine and violence: he has the accumulated experience of that, he has overcome internal crises and now he puts on a new face, being threatened with extinction through the emergence of a new science that rouses man from his age-old slumbers. This new science frees man from his prejudices and equips him for self-discovery and discovery of his true place in life, despite all the efforts of the sorcerers' apprentices from that union of the "five" to block his progress down that avenue.

Thus, such a change of face on the part of our enemy, oppressed brother, can be noted, say, in everything that emanates from the chambers of the State's erudite reformers. We have watched a typical example of such a metamorphosis in the revolutions we have witnessed at first-hand. The union of the "five," the State, our enemy, seemed at first to have vanished completely from the face of the earth.

In reality, our enemy merely altered his appearance and found himself new allies who schemed criminally against us: the example of the Bolshevik-Communists in Russia, in the Ukraine, in Georgia and among many Central Asian peoples is very edifying in this regard. This is a lesson that will never be forgotten by the man fighting for his emancipation, for the nightmarish criminality will be engraved in him.

The sole, the surest weapon available to the victim of oppression in his battle against the evil that binds him is the social revolution, a profound leap forward in the direction of human evolution.

Although the social revolution occurs spontaneously, organization smoothes its passage, eases the appearance of breaches in the ramparts erected against it and speeds its coming. The revolutionary anarchist beavers away in the here and now along these lines. Every victim of oppression become sensible of the yoke weighing him down, realizing that this ignominy is crushing the life out of the human race, should come to the aid of the anarchist. Every human being should be aware of his responsibility and see it through by casting out of society all the executioners and parasites from the union of "five," so that mankind may breathe free.

Every man and above all the revolutionary anarchist — as the pioneer inciting struggle for the ideal of freedom, solidarity and equality — ought to bear it in mind that the social revolution, if it is to evolve creatively, requires adequate means, especially ongoing organizational resources, particularly during the phase when, in a spontaneous outburst, it tears slavery up by the roots and plants freedom, affirming every man's entitlement to free and unbounded development. This is the very time when, coming alive to the freedom within and surrounding them, individuals and masses will make bold to act upon the gains of the social revolution, and that revolution will have most need of such organizational resources. For example, revolutionary anarchists played a particularly outstanding role in the Russian revolution, but, not being possessed of the requisite means of action, were unable to see their historical mission through. Moreover, that revolution demonstrated to us the following truth: after having rid themselves of the bonds of slavery, the masses of humanity have no intention of creating new ones. On the contrary: during times of revolution, the masses fetch about for new forms of free associations capable not only of responding to their libertarian instincts, but also of defending their gains should the enemy mount an attack.

Observing this process at work, we were constantly drawn to the conclusion that the most fruitful and most valuable associations could not be other than the commune-unions, the ones whose social resources are conjured up by life itself: the free soviets. Basing himself on that same belief, the revolutionary anarchist hurls himself into selfless action and exhorts the oppressed to

join the struggle for free associations. He is convinced that not only must the essential creative organizational precepts be demonstrated: there is also the need to equip oneself with the wherewithal to defend the new life-style against hostile forces. Practice has shown that this has to be pursued most firmly and supported by the masses themselves, in person and on the spot.

In carrying through the revolution, under the impulsion of the anarchism that is innate in them, the masses of humanity search for free associations. Free assemblies always command their sympathy. The revolutionary anarchist must help them to formulate this approach as best they can. For instance, the economic problem of the free association of communes must find full expression in the creation of production and consumer cooperatives, of which the free soviets will be the sponsors. It is through the good offices of the free soviets while the revolution is rippling outwards, that the masses will themselves lay hands upon the entirety of the social heritage: the land, forests, workshops, factories, railways and seaborne transportation, etc., and then, banding together on the basis of interests, affinities or a shared ideal, they will rebuild their social life along the most varied lines to suit their needs and wishes.

It goes without saying that this will be a vicious struggle; it will cost a huge number of lives, for it will pit free humankind against the old world for one last time. There will be no room for hesitation or sentiment. It will be a life or death struggle! At any rate, that is how any man who places any store by his rights and the rights of humankind should think of it, unless he wishes to remain a beast of burden, a slave, as he is compelled to be at the moment.

When healthy reasoning and love of oneself and of others alike gain the ascendancy in life, man will become the authentic author of his own existence.

Organize, oppressed brother, summon all men from plow and workshop, from school and university desk, not forgetting the scholar and the intellectual generally, so that he may venture beyond his chambers and help you along your daunting course. It is true that nine out of ten intellectuals may fail to answer your call or, if they do respond, will do so with the intention of pulling the wool over your eyes, for remember that they are the faithful servants of the union of the "five." Even so, there will be that one in ten who will prove your friend and will help you puncture the deceit of the other nine. As far as physical violence, the brute force of those who govern and legislate, is concerned, you will see it off with violence of your own.

Organize, summon all your brethren to join the movement and insist of all who govern that, of their own volition, they cease their craven profession of regulating the life of man. Should they refuse, rise up, disarm their police, militiamen and the other guard-dogs of the union of the "five." Arrest all governors for as long as need be, tear up and burn their laws! Tear down the prisons, once you have annihilated the executioners and eradicate all State power!

Many paid killers and assassins are in the army, but your friends, the draftees, are there also. Call them to your side and they will come to your aid and help you neutralize the mercenaries.

Once you have all come together into one big family, brethren, we will march together down the path of enlightenment and knowledge, we will leave the shadows behind and stride towards mankind's common ideal: the free and fraternal life, the society wherein no one will be a slave any longer, nor humiliated by anyone.

To the brute violence of our foes we will make reply through the compact force of our insurgent revolutionary army. To incoherence and arbitrariness, we will make reply by erecting our new life upon a foundation of justice, on a basis of individual responsibility, the true guarantor of freedom and social justice for all.

Only the blood-thirsty criminals of the union of the “five” will refuse to join us on the path to innovation: they will try to oppose us so as to cling to their privileges, thereby signing their own death warrant.

Long live this clear, firm belief in the struggle for the ideal of general human harmony: the anarchist society!

*Probuzdeniye* No. 18, Jan. 1932, pp. 57–63 and no 19–20, Feb.-March 1932, pp. 16–20.

# Chapter 17. Open Letter to Spanish Anarchists

Dear Comrades Carbó and Pestaña,

Convey to our friends and comrades and, through them, to all Spanish workers my encouragement to them not to let their resolution falter in the revolutionary process which has been launched, as well as to make haste in uniting around a practical program drafted along libertarian lines. At all costs there must be no let up in the pace of the masses' revolutionary action. On the contrary, we must rush to help them compel (by force if there is no other way, no other means) the acting republican government which is hindering and distracting the revolution with its absurd decrees to desist from such harmful endeavors.

The Spanish toilers — workers, peasants and working intelligentsia — must unite and display the utmost revolutionary energy so as to conjure into existence a situation whereby the bourgeoisie may be precluded from opposing the seizure of land, factories and full freedoms: a situation that would thus become more and more widespread and irreversible.

It is crucial that no effort be spared to get the Spanish toilers to grasp this and understand that to let this make-or-break moment slip by whilst remaining inactive and making do with the mere passing of splendid resolutions which come to nothing, would be tantamount to unwittingly playing into the hands of the revolution's enemies, allowing them to seize the initiative and giving them time to recover and then to snuff out the revolution that is underway.

To that end, there is a need for a union of libertarian forces, most especially in the shape of the foundation of a great peasant union that would federate with the CNT, and within which anarchists would beaver away indefatigably.

It is also vital that the workers get help to establish, on the spot, organs of economic and social self-direction — free soviets — as well as armed detachments for the defense of the revolutionary social measures that they will inevitably be imposing once they have come to their senses and broken all the chains of their slavish condition. Only in this way and by such broadly social action methods will the revolutionary workers be capable of striking while the iron is hot against the attempt by a new system of exploitation to drive the revolution off course. As I see it, the FAI and the CNT must take this problem seriously and to that end, be able to call upon action groups in every village and town: likewise, they must not be afraid to assume the reins of the strategic, organizational and theoretical revolutionary leadership of the toilers' movement. Obviously they will have to steer clear here of unity with the political parties generally and with the Bolshevik-communists in particular, for I imagine that their Spanish counterparts will be worthy imitators of their Russian mentors. They will follow in the footsteps of the Jesuit Lenin or even of Stalin, not hesitating to assert their monopoly over all the gains of the revolution, with an eye to establishing the power of their party in the country, an aim the effects of which are familiar from the shameful example of Russia: the silencing of all free revolutionary tendencies and of all independent toilers' organizations. Indeed they see themselves as holding power alone and being in a position to

control all freedoms and rights in the revolution. So they will inevitably betray their allies and the very cause of the revolution.

The Spanish revolution is the cause of workers the world over and in this undertaking there is no way that there can be any common ground with the party that, in the name of its dictatorship over the country, would have no hesitation in deceiving the workers and laying hands on all their revolutionary gains, in order to emerge as the worst despots and foes of the freedoms and rights of the people.

The Russian precedent must spare you that. May the calamity of Bolshevik communism never take root in the revolutionary soil of Spain!

Long live the union of the workers, peasants and working intellectuals of the whole of Spain!

Long live the Spanish revolution as it strides towards a new world of increasingly liberating gains, under the banner of anarchism!

With my fraternal best wishes,

Nestor Makhno

29 April 1931

*Probuzdeniye* No. 23–27, June–October 1932, pp. 77–78.

# **Chapter 18. On the History of the Spanish Revolution of 1931 and the Part Played by the Left and Right-Wing Socialists and the Anarchists**

Whenever a revolution breaks out — and regardless of its character — (the most important point is that broad masses of workers and peasants should have a hand in it) and its guides, whether a compact group or a scattering of individuals, enjoying a special authority in the eyes of the workers, place themselves above these masses and do not march in step with them and do not earn their trust, waiting for something out of the ordinary to happen or even, worse still, seek to subordinate them by trying to point them along the “only” path to follow, well, the revolution fails to develop thoroughly enough and fails to resolve or even correctly formulate the attendant problems in need of resolution. Then it cannot devise new and additional methods of social action to thwart its enemies and meet the pressing needs: whereupon it is induced to adopt vague directions and gets lost amid their fatal zigzags. At that point, it either perishes under the blows of those against whom it is targeted, or it changes tack, doubles back on its steps and is wound up in accordance with the interests of its internal enemies.

Often, all these considerations have been decisive during the revolutions which have occurred thus far, both in Europe and elsewhere. The same thing has happened in Spain. True, the Spanish revolution of 1931 stands apart from lots of others on account of its very specific features. It was not unleashed by means of a revolutionary whirlwind in the towns and countryside, but rather by the ballot box. As it proceeded, thanks to the actions of its left-wing elements, it broke free of those initial moorings and entered the vast precincts of the liberating social action of the toilers. Whilst it nonetheless finished to the advantage of authoritarian elements, and proved tragic for the fate of the workers and many revolutionaries, as well as for what these had managed to achieve, the responsibility for that lies largely with the Spanish left-wing political groupings. That unfortunate denouement can be chalked up to the authoritarian and the anti-authoritarian socialists, which is to say to our libertarian communist and anarcho-syndicalist comrades.

The responsibility of the right-wing state socialists consists of their having been tied from the outset to the bourgeois party of Alcala Zamora. True, the grassroots militants of the party, especially the workers, did not want to hear talk of this policy, especially as they were not aware of the hidden negotiations of their party’s “bigwigs” with the bourgeoisie, negotiations directed at their assuming joint power, albeit at the price of sacrificing the revolution. It was only when the socialist workers found themselves under questioning from other workers about their party’s policy, and had no idea how to reply, that their leaders hypocritically strutted like peacocks before the bourgeoisie, striking a little fear into its representatives by declaring themselves ready to seize power alone with the aid of the workers only. This double dealing by the socialist leaders

regarding the revolution, mounted despite the pretenses by taking cognizance of the aspirations of the workers as represented by other social revolutionary organizations, nonetheless sowed the most utter confusion in the minds and understanding of the workers as far as the developing revolution was concerned, and in the last analysis it eroded the best and most combative features of their struggle, everything that had enabled them to score a complete and enthusiastic victory over the monarchists and the king.

The Spanish toilers sensed instinctively that the time had come for new and free forms of social living. The right-wing socialist “bigwigs” pretended outwardly to congratulate themselves on this, but in fact and in secret they worked to disappoint these aspirations, and in so doing they did enormous harm to the first steps of the revolution.

The guilt of the Bolshevik-communists — they who are “further to the left than the left” of the state socialists, so to speak — resides in their having done nothing on behalf of the cause of real emancipation of the workers, but instead only for their own sordid and petty partisan interests. They saw the revolution as a means whereby they might, at their ease, stuff proletarian heads with the most demagogic promises and then, having sucked them into the authoritarian vortex, use them bodily to hoist their filthy party dictatorship into position over the country. When they realized that their demagogic ploys were making no headway with the toilers, they suborned or deceived a few adventurist elements into organizing violent demonstrations, whilst drawing the unarmed workers into them. These demonstrations, however, brought them no success either. Blood flowed freely during these workers’ defeats, dreamt up by people who kept well out of the action. All of which merely strengthened the coalition between the right wing socialists and Alcala Zamora and the bourgeoisie, bolstering it not just against the left’s “would-be dictators,” but also against the revolution generally. As for the Bolshevik “communists,” they belong to the same Marxist-Leninist school as their Russian counterparts: they are nothing more than Jesuits and traitors to all who

struggle against Capital and for the emancipation of the proletariat whilst refusing to pass between their Caudine Forks. During the Spanish revolution of 1931, they were not strong enough — and still are not — to display their treachery openly. Even so, they have successfully mounted several provocations and peddled calumnies, not so much against the bourgeoisie as against their political adversaries on the left. That fact partly accounts for the difficulty the revolution has experienced in ridding itself of bourgeois thinking and bourgeois leaders, for it has had to fight simultaneously against the demoralization peddled by these “leftist” traitors. The latter operate on the behalf of their dictatorship and not for the sake of real social freedom, which blends the solidarity and equality of opinion of all who have made the radical break with the onerous past of exploitation and who are striding right now towards a new world.

Spanish libertarian communists and anarcho-syndicalists have a particular responsibility in the shaping of events, above all because they departed from their basic principles in taking an active part in that revolution, so as to wrest the initiative from the liberal bourgeoisie, no doubt, but whilst remaining, regardless, on the latter’s parasitical class terrain. They have, for one thing, taken absolutely no notice of the requirements of our age, and for another, they have underestimated the scale of the resources available to the bourgeoisie in containing and eliminating all who create trouble for it.

What has stopped anarchists from putting their beliefs into practice, so as to turn a bourgeois republican revolution into a social revolution?

In the first place, the absence of a specific and detailed program has prevented them from achieving unity of action, the unity that determines the expansion of the movement during a period of revolution and of its influence over everything around it.

Secondly, our Spanish comrades, like many comrades elsewhere, regard anarchism as an itinerant church of freedom... That attitude regularly prevents them from arriving at the desired times and places at the working structures essential to the economic and social organization whose duty it is to weave multiple connections between the everyday and global struggle of the toilers. This has thwarted them, on this occasion, from accomplishing the historical task that devolves upon anarchism in time of revolution. For all the prestige they enjoyed in the eyes of the workers in the country, Spanish libertarian communists and anarcho-syndicalists have failed to tilt in the direction of revolution the minds of masses dithering between their sympathy with revolution and a petit-bourgeois outlook. They ought to have been converted into activists for the spread and defense of the revolution. Instead of which, feeling themselves surrounded by relative freedom, the anarchists, like so many petit-bourgeois, have indulged themselves in interminable discussions. By word of mouth and in writing, they have expounded absolutely freely on all manner of topics: they have held rallies galore, with fine professions of faith, but they have overlooked the fact that those who supplanted the king spent that time entrenching their power to the best of their ability.

Unfortunately, in this regard, not a thing was done at the appropriate time, even though that was as vital as could be, given that the occasion was ideal and the circumstances favorable. At that point, the Spanish anarchists had real opportunities — a lot more than all the other revolutionary groupings in the country — to settle in practice upon a strategy that would have brought the revolution a step closer. The CNT expanded its membership at a dizzying rate and became, for all who labor, the spokesman and the forum through which the toilers' age-old hopes might at last find expression.

In order to play up this active role of our movement even more, the bourgeoisie and its power should have been felled and its influence upon the revolutionary movement eradicated utterly. Does this mean that our Spanish comrades achieved nothing along these lines during that revolutionary year of 1931? Certainly not. They did all in their power to convert the political revolution into social revolution. Heroically, they shouldered the sacrifices of that, and even now that the revolution has been smothered, many of them are still enduring the rigors of repression. However, all such sacrifices have been in vain, to the extent that they were not made for the sake of suitable objectives. And all, let me repeat, because anarchism possesses no hard and fast program, because the anarchist activities that have been carried out have been, and are still, conducted amidst the most utter dispersion, rather than springing from a tactical unity determined and enlightened by a theoretical unity, by a single shared goal. It is for these specific reasons that the Spanish anarchists have not been able to bring their endeavors to fruition and it is this that induced the ones whose convictions were weakest to issue the celebrated "Manifesto of the Thirty" — quite ill-timed — in the name of its authors' "heightened sense of responsibility." The most determined and intrepid militants, the ones that do not merely peddle their ideas but also go to the lengths of dying for them, those ones languish in filthy dungeons, in the holds of vessels deporting them to distant shores, to hostile lands.

Such, in broad outline, are the omissions, errors and shortcomings fatal for revolutionary activity that have been perpetrated by Spanish leftist groupings, at a decisive moment that comes

but rarely in history and which has brought the Spanish revolution to its present straits. All those groups therefore carry the responsibility for the situation.

What conclusions the statist socialists, they who can do nothing better than play the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, whilst seeking to make lackeys of their own of other revolutionaries, will draw from this I cannot tell. As far as revolutionary anarchists are concerned, I believe they have food for thought here, if they are to be spared in the future [whether in Spain or elsewhere] from a repetition of these same mistakes: finding themselves in the revolution's advanced outposts without access to the resources necessary for defense of the masses' revolutionary gains against the bitter onslaughts of their bourgeois and authoritarian socialist foes.

Obviously, revolutionary anarchists must not have recourse to the methods of Bolsheviks as some have occasionally been tempted to do, even to the extent of urging the establishment of "close contact" with the Bolshevik state (as the "innovator" Arshinov has lately argued). Revolutionary anarchists have nothing to look for in Bolshevism: they have a revolutionary theory of their own that is indeed very rich, and which lays down tasks utterly at odds with those of the Bolsheviks in the life and struggle of the toiling classes. They cannot reconcile their goals with the goals of Pan-Bolshevism, which thrusts itself so savagely, by ruble and bayonet, into the lives of the toilers in the USSR, deliberately ignoring their rights and turning them into compliant slaves, incapable of independent reflection, or thinking for themselves about their welfare and the welfare of the other toilers in the world.

No matter how devoted it may be to the movement's cause, no anarchist individual or group can carry out the tasks described all unaided. All attempts made thus far testify to that. Why is understandable: no individual or group can, unaided, unite our movement, nationally or internationally. These mammoth and crucial tasks can only be accomplished by an international libertarian think-tank. That is what I told Rudolf Rocker and Alexander Berkman in Berlin nearly seven years ago now. And I reaffirm it all the more staunchly now, now that many libertarians openly acknowledge — after a whole series of fruitless attempts to devise something practical — that there is no other way of arriving at a program shaped by and attuned to our times and our resources, than by the calling of a preparatory conference, (involving those militants most active and committed in matters theoretical and practical alike) the task of which would be formulate the theses that would respond to the anarchist movement's vital issues, theses thrashed out in anticipation of an international anarchist congress. The latter in turn would develop and complement these theses. In the wake of that congress, these theses would amount to a definite program and solid reference point for our movement, a reference point with a validity in every country. Which would rescue our movement from reformist and muddle-headed deviations and invest it with the necessary potency to become the vanguard of contemporary revolutions.

True, this is no easy undertaking: however, determination and solidarity from those who can and who wish to carry it off will greatly facilitate this endeavor. Let this undertaking commence, for our movement cannot but gain by it!

Long live the fraternal and shared hopes of all Anarchist militants that they may see the realization of that grand undertaking — the endeavor of our movement and of the social revolution for which we struggle!

France 1931

*Probuzdeniye* No. 30–31, January–February 1933, pp. 19–23

# Chapter 19. Bibliographical Afterword by Alexandre Skirda

Among the articles by Nestor Makhno left out of this anthology, we might mention the one on the peasantry and the Bolsheviks,<sup>1</sup> where he sets out the (in fact, quite well-known) socio-economic differentials between the wealthy peasants, or *kulaks*, the middle peasantry or *serednyakis*, the poor peasants or *bednyakis*, and the farm laborers or *batrakis*. Categories that the Bolsheviko-Stalinist policy of developing rural capitalism in the 1920s tended to reduce to its extremities alone: to the kulaks and the batrakis, to the detriment of the overwhelming majority of the peasantry. We know, here, that from 1929 to 1934, this policy was escalated in such a way as to lead to the utter dispossession of the peasants of their land, and this at the price of the holocaust of its times, which has been underplayed thus far, for this “de-kulakisation” cost the lives of 15 million victims, according to reliable estimates. Let it be noted that this was the real epilogue to the civil war, for this genocide affected primarily those regions of Russia, the Ukraine and Don and the Volga, which had been the areas then most refractory to the new regime. As for the results of this demented warfare against people on the land, these were extremely retrograde: the kulaks, previously a tiny minority, were replaced by the Kulak-State, whilst the survivors of the slaughter, re-christened “kolkhozians” — which is to say, farm workers — were reduced in their circumstances to the status of real State serfs. Unfortunately, Makhno did not have access to adequate information about this criminal policy on the part of Stalin and his henchmen, which is what makes his piece obsolete.

In his *Open Letter to the Central Committee of the Russian CP*<sup>2</sup> which appeared in 1928, Makhno expressed his outrage at a misrepresentation of his dealings with Bela Kun, at the time of his second treaty with the Red Army in September 1920. He clarified another historical point in his *How the Bolsheviks Lie*.<sup>3</sup> He re-established the truth about the anarchist sailor Anatoly Zhelezniakov, who broke up the sitting of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. Makhno defended that action and explained that Zhelezniakov, a Black Sea sailor and delegate to Kronstadt, had played one of the most active roles in 1917. Makhno merely expressed regret that the fiery sailor, who enjoyed great prestige among his colleagues, had not simultaneously seen fit to dismiss Lenin and his “Soviet of People’s Commissars” which “would have been historically vital and would have helped unmask the stranglers of the revolution in good time.” In a short piece, *England’s Policy and the World Tasks of the Revolutionary Toilers*<sup>4</sup>, he lashed British imperialism and floated the idea that there was no way of resisting its plans for the revolution and the USSR, by virtue of the fact that, inside the USSR, “there is neither freedom of speech, nor of assembly, nor of the press,

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<sup>1</sup> *Dyelo Truda* February-March 1928, No. 33–34, pp. 7–9.

<sup>2</sup> *Dyelo Truda* June-July 1928, No. 37–38, pp. 10–12.

<sup>3</sup> *Dyelo Truda* March 1927, No. 22, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> *Dyelo Truda* July-August 1927, No. 10–12.

nor of independent organization for workers.” As a result, there was not a thing worth defending as long as there was this denial of justice vis à vis their “rights to be free and responsible.”

We might also cite his *Appeal on Behalf of the Anarchist Black Cross*, where he labored the need for aid for libertarians around the world, and in particular in the USSR, persecuted for their beliefs.

For access in French to all Makhno’s output, one has only to look to his Memoirs — nigh on six hundred pages of them — which is to say, seek out some publisher to publish them, something we have not been successful in doing, despite numerous fruitless overtures thus far. It might also be desirable if Arshinov’s *History of the Makhnovist Movement* was republished in a new translation as soon as possible (the translation by Voline being, occasionally, flawed), again necessitating the goodwill of some heavyweight publisher. Those two books would certainly not be going over old ground, either with regard to each other, or to my monograph on Makhno, for the latter was actually planned as a complementary project.

This strikes us as the appropriate point to review some publications and new information which have come to our attention since our book (the product of eighteen years of research and authentication, which is to say, no spur of the moment affair, which is more than can be said for most publications in the field) was published. Broadly speaking, we have a parade of the sensational aspects of certain charges or claims, in such a way as to push into the background the true significance of the Makhnovist insurgent movement. This is the case, say, with the publication by Pavel Litvinov (grandson of Stalin’s Foreign Affairs minister) of a samizdat text (a self-published, clandestine text) entitled *Nestor Makhno and the Jewish Question*.<sup>5</sup> The author strives to show that Makhno was never an anti-Semite: quite the opposite, in fact, he “deserves to have his memory respected and honored by the Jews.” That would be an attractive approach, were it not that he is trying doors that are already gaping wide open, for, as we have indicated, even Bolshevik historical writings have always rebutted that absurd allegation. Furthermore, Litvinov connects this issue with the re-emergence of Jewish nationality and indeed with the attempt to establish a revolutionary Jewish “Zion” in the Ukraine! What is rather positive though is that Litvinov seizes upon the opportunity to rehearse the chief characteristics and achievements of the Makhnovist movement, especially its active role in the defeat of the Whites. We might note that the essential sources he uses have been published outside Russia: some are drawn from Russian anarchist reviews and works published in France and the United States during the 1920s and 1930s: which is to say that these have, in spite of everything, achieved their purpose by helping to re-establish the true facts of the matter. Aside from the odd inaccuracy — Makhno working in Paris as a cinema technician! — Litvinov’s work should be read, especially in Israel and by Jewish readers, given that many of them are still believers in “tales” about Makhno. On the other hand, it has nothing new to offer Western readers with access to much more exhaustive texts and writings on the topic: so it is hard to understand the sensational publicity that certain French and Italian anarchists have afforded him.<sup>6</sup> Maybe this is because, for a very long time, there was a dearth of historical and theoretical studies of anarchism, which explains why many anarchists have become “a ready market” and applaud the moment that some academic or anybody outside of the movement and not sharing its ideas deigns to show some interest in Anarchy!

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<sup>5</sup> P. Litvinov *Nestor Makhno et la question juive* 21 typewritten pages dated 18 June 1982, Moscow. This text has been published by the magazine *Vremya i my* (*Time and Us*) in Israel, No. 17, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> *A Rivista Anarchica*, 8 November 1983, Milan (Italy).

We have also come by a copy of another handwritten text in Russian, dealing with the life of Leon Zadov-Zinkovsky, commander of the unit that smuggled a seriously wounded Makhno into Rumania in August 1921. The manuscript's author, one Jacob Gridin, presents himself as a former member of the NKVD (the Cheka was at first renamed the GPU, then NKVD, before adopting the current straightforward title of KGB) who has emigrated to Israel. According to Gridin, Zadov — who had been in charge of the Makhnovist intelligence service for a while — allegedly contacted the GPU during his exile in Rumania and rendered them stalwart services. In particular he is supposed to have lured a captain from French Counter-espionage into an ambush in the Ukraine and murdered him in his sleep, all to demonstrate his bona fides to the GPU and secure his own rehabilitation, as well as that of his brother. This little spy story even includes a pretty young exploited widow whom Zadov supposedly set himself the task of consoling! The edge to the whole thing is that it is alleged here that Zadov is alleged to have been issued with orders from his superiors in Moscow to "liquidate" Makhno, who is supposed to have been staying in 1922 in one of the best hotels in Warsaw (in reality, he was enjoying the "delights" of a long and uncomfortable stay in the political prison in the city!). Zadov is supposed to have accomplished his mission successfully and to have lived in comfort until the "nasty" Stalinist purges of 1938, when he fell into the trap.

As we have no knowledge about the real fate of Zadov, there is every scope for embroidery upon his fate: however, there is rather too much unlikeliness here and we should remember, first, that in Bolshevik studies Zadov and his brother are portrayed as the executors of Makhno's "dirty work," and above all as implacable killers of Bolsheviks: second, that they had been convinced anarchist militants since 1905, something that had earned them several years in tsarist prisons, and third, that they had repeatedly proved their commitment to the Makhnovist movement's cause.

All of this makes us very skeptical about such absurdities about them, unless there is some confusion with quite different individuals. Moreover, further revelations along similar lines are to be expected of Soviet Jewish émigrés, for a fair number of them are either, as is the case with Gridin, ex-members of the GPU, or privileged members of the State apparatus and other sectors of the regime, or indeed the children or parents of such. Obviously there can be no question of placing the slightest credence in misinformation exercises of this sort, unless we can be very sure that there is the documentary evidence or tangible proof to back up their ramblings.<sup>7</sup>

In our book, we made reference to the existence of a handwritten set of memoirs on Makhno by Ida Mett, a member of the *Dyelo Truda* group from 1925 to 1928. One small press has had the splendid idea of turning these out as a 28-page pamphlet (out of the original six and a quarter pages!), with the addition of a few personal remarks on the "radicality of Nestor Makhno, wherein he shows himself to be resolutely modern, thereby outstripping practically and historically the anarchist ideology. For Makhno, the revolution cannot in any way be the authentication of any ideology — even be it anarchist — but spells the doom of all ideologies."<sup>8</sup> For some years now, it has been fashionable to bandy the word 'ideology' about indiscriminately in every direction, but if one takes the word to mean a coherent view of life and society, it would be a good idea to compare these glib, empty assertions with the views spelled out plentifully in the writings of Makhno as set out in the foregoing anthology. As for Ida Mett's text, we have already outlined its

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<sup>7</sup> A 16-page manuscript.

<sup>8</sup> Ida Mett, *Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno*, Paris 1983, pp. 25–26.

limitations. Some of its remarks are cringe-making: Makhno was “jealous of the Jews,” but “had it in him to be a Jew’s friend without any effort of will”(?) and was also “jealous of intellectuals” and, more to the point, “jealous” of the careers of the Red generals Budyenny and Voroshilov, so much so that “his head was willy nilly, filled notions that he too could have made a Red Army general. Yet he himself never said as much to me.”(!) Such a “telepathic” analysis does much to undermine the impact of such an evaluation and may even come within a hair’s breadth of common calumny and tittle-tattle: it would be better left unsaid. Ida Mett, whom we ourselves knew, deserves to be remembered by other, more pertinent writings.

We come now to one of the most intriguing bibliographical novelties. In our biography of Makhno, we mentioned the existence of hitherto unpublished manuscripts by Voline to which we had been unable to gain access. These had been in the possession of Rosa Dubinsky, widow of the first publisher of Voline’s posthumous *The Unknown Revolution* and then seized *manu militari* by Voline’s eldest son, Igor Eichenbaum, who at the time held political views far removed from his father’s. On the basis of what Rosa Dubinsky has told us, the historian Daniel Guerin seems to have played a questionable role at that time. He has since sent us a denial wherein he claims that “this matter proceeded unbeknownst to him.”<sup>9</sup> Hereby noted.

We also learned later that there were several copies of these manuscripts in circulation: one with Daniel Guerin, then the secretariat for History of the French Anarchist Federation, and, finally, a copy was placed by Leo Eichenbaum, Voline’s second son, with the ‘Sound and Picture Archive’ set up by Roland Fornari.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the kindness of the latter, we were able to consult these famous unpublished notes by Voline. What do they contain? Well, to our great amazement, there is, for a start, and above all, the conclusion to *The Unknown Revolution*, which all four of the successive editions of the book deliberately discarded! The text is quite substantial — a hundred and ten pages — and only that part dealing with the Voline-Trotsky meeting in New York, a little before they returned to Russia in 1917, was used by Daniel Guerin in the latest edition of his anthology *Ni Dieu, ni Maître*. Given that he also saw to the publication of the most recent editions of *The Unknown Revolution*, we asked him why these had been deprived of the “conclusion” which was a natural part of the book. His answer to us was that the decision had been made jointly with Igor Eichenbaum, because it struck them that the conclusion’s contents “weakened” the remainder of the book. Having read it in our turn, we are not of that mind, for it seems to us to fit perfectly with the psycho-moral analyses of Voline and, whereas he is mistaken in depicting world events “from 1914 up to September 1947” as the “destructive period of the world revolution,” the constructive phase being due to “pass a lot quicker,” mistakes are still possible, but there cannot, as we see it, be any case for censoring a posthumous work of its “conclusion,” which ought to make sense of the whole thing. It is our hope that in some forthcoming edition of the book, this lacuna may be well and truly filled. Those unpublished papers also include Voline’s correspondence from the period towards the end of his life, where he touches upon the matter that concerns us here. In a letter to one Henri, dated 4.11.1944 in Marseilles, he rounded upon someone called Frémont who was alleged to have “peddled rumors about his relations with Makhno.” Frémont had had it from “Makhno’s own lips that, from a certain point onwards, he and I had not been on as friendly terms as previously. It may even be the case that Makhno turned him against me somewhat,” and Frémont had supposedly made the

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<sup>9</sup> Letter to the author, 27 December 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Address: 5 rue Caplat, 75018 Paris.

“silly charge” against him that he had “stolen some documents from Makhno.” As “formal and palpable proof of the nonsensicality of that crude concoction” Voline cited three arguments in his defense.

1. He claimed to have “sacrificed two full years of his activities, in 1921–1923, to bringing out Arshinov’s *History of the Makhnovist Movement*,” and he added, “And I do mean ‘sacrificed,’ for I could have devoted my free time to my own literary output as I was pressed to do and as I was interested in doing.”
2. He had taken a back seat in deference to Arshinov for he himself had spent only six months with the Makhnovist movement, whereas Arshinov had been with it right to the end and was thus better “qualified to write a history of it.” Later he simply made use of that history and made do with adding a few personal anecdotes in that part of his *The Unknown Revolution* dealing with the Makhnovist movement. That amounts only to a banal statement of the facts as far as any alert reader is concerned, but it is good to find Voline himself making the point.
3. He refers to his work as ‘literary editor’ of Volumes II and III of Makhno’s memoirs which appeared in Russian in 1936 and 1937. Followed by the translations into French of his forewords to both volumes, as well as part of his introduction to the Makhnovist movement, lifted from *The Unknown Revolution*.

Voline closed a second letter to Henri on 11.11.1944 with the wish that his clarifications “will satisfy comrades’ curiosity” and “prove (to them) that the lies about my conduct are simply the result of a crude and stupid calumny capitalizing upon the ignorance of many comrades regarding the truth of the matter.” Without knowing more about the precise content of this “calumny” we can only note Voline’s arguments and leave the individual reader to make of them what he will.

Let us make special note of Voline’s explanation of the fate of Makhno’s manuscripts: Galina Kuzmenko, Makhno’s wife, was forced to burn her husband’s trunk during the German occupation and brought the fact to Voline’s attention before leaving for Germany in 1942. We might note her thoughtlessness in doing so; she would have been better advised to entrust them to trustworthy friends or to some library.

In other letters to Marie Louise (Berner?) Voline outlines the complete story of his writings on the Russian revolution, in fact of the gestation of *The Unknown Revolution*. He also promises there a forthcoming work on Makhno, but admits finding problems “getting to grips with it.” He was depending upon making use of the notes that he had used for lectures on Makhno in 1935–36. His TB denied him the time to do so and he succumbed to it shortly afterwards, leaving the project at the notes and drafts stage, all of it nonetheless amounting to some 236 pages, partly typed. Let us have a look at the contents.

The text is entitled “Makhno, a Contribution to Studies of the Enigma of the Personality.” Drafted in 1945, it deals in broad terms with the Russian revolution and furnishes autobiographical details about Voline himself. Its primary interest for our purposes is its disclosure of Voline’s input into Arshinov’s *History of the Makhnovist Movement*. It was on Voline’s insistence that Arshinov mentioned the movement’s flaws and those of Makhno himself, after he had told him that “set alongside the tremendous positive aspects to the movement, what few shortcomings there may have been are really of no consequence” (pages 31, 45 and 126). According to Voline this

‘overlooking’ of the movement’s weaknesses is very much to be regretted because these “in his estimation, outweigh the positive sides of it.” That critique sets the tone for his whole approach: he switches back and forth between eulogy and the most acerbic criticism, for instance, in a thumbnail sketch of Makhno: “He was an extremely complex personality, ‘muddled’ might be the right word: a sort of formidable ‘raw’ genius, replete with flaws, boorishness and sophistication on a par with his marks of genius...” “Beyond question, he is to be numbered in the Russian revolution among that type of personality that one never manages to understand completely, personalities that remain in History forever a little ‘elusive’... Enormous positive aspects coexisting alongside profound negative traits...” (page 38).

In an unfinished chapter entitled “the nub of the matter,” Voline upbraids the existence among the “Ukrainian peasantry, as indeed among peasants (and in fact manual workers generally) all over the world, of a hybrid feeling of diffidence, contempt and sullen hostility that can sometimes boil over into acute fits of hatred, vis à-vis intellectuals, ‘non-manual’ workers and ‘non-peasants.’ He then denounces the “very widespread and harmful prejudice among revolutionary militants:” “concealing from the ‘public’ and from ordinary party militants for as long as they can manage it, the weak sides, ‘shadows,’ shortcomings and deficiencies of the movement.” For his part, he had, with “desperate studiousness and in dribs and drabs” catalogued the “dark sides” of Makhno’s personality: in 1938, he “was already in possession of a fair bit of information,” but, “by the time he had reached the end of his work (late 1941), knew a lot more...” We might wonder at these belated revelations for, as he himself admits, although he had spent six months on Makhno’s company in 1919–1920, he had not “known a thing about the personal, intimate life that would have afforded him an insight into the very depths of the personality (of Makhno).” Furthermore, Makhno “had never made the slightest gesture to strike up a more personal friendship with him.” Thus, in order to unlock his true personality, he would use as his chief source the confidences of Galina Kuzmenko, Makhno’s wife, who was contradicted, it seems, by certain “Makhnovist commanders” who had fled to France (unfortunately, Makhno never named these) while allegedly looking upon her as a “mismatch” with Makhno.

Voline outlines a very eulogistic sketch of Makhno’s good qualities: “I should say a speedy and thorough grip of the truth, which he managed to divine from life overall... “A precise, acute and never-weakening attention to everything that he regarded as significant in life, whether his own or life in general ... possession of an extremely solid and luminous over-arching idea, is also a mark of genius.” “A boundless audacity and temerity with regard not just to fighting but to life as a whole... He strove to make life what he wanted it to be.” “A specific talent for fighting, by which I do not mean a military talent ... he never lost his sang-froid, his daring and he conducted himself with such simplicity and precision and simultaneously with clear, cool tactics until such time as his object was achieved.” However, as a “lopsided man of genius, whose nervousness also was in excess of the norm,” the more Makhno “learned of the marks of genius, the more he knew of its high points and of its lows” (pages 58–63).

After these roses, the thorns. Voline notes that Makhno and he were temperamentally incompatible, so much so that, when Makhno had him released from the Cheka prison in October 1920, he hesitated before joining him in the Ukraine. Furthermore, according to him, Makhno had an annoying habit of flourishing his revolver at the slightest pretext, even to the extent of threatening his future comrade with it, perhaps to “test his mettle”(?) as well as members of the Makhnovist movement’s soviet, and above all, of gunning down where they stood certain deserters from the front or insurgents guilty of outrages. He supposedly killed people “without having

delved into their case and without knowing if they were innocent or guilty" (pages 138). If there is any substance to this, that reproach strikes us as the most significant of Voline's criticisms for, as far as the rest goes, we seem to be dealing with something of an obsession on his part, deriving probably from the run-ins they had had as émigrés, both personally (Makhno had accused Voline of dishonesty) and theoretically (Voline supported the Anarchist Synthesis whilst Makhno was an enthusiast of the Platform).

We might also note a few surprising inaccuracies in Voline's information; he has Makhno dying a year earlier than in fact he did and credits him with having had as his real name the pseudonym — Mikhnienko — under which he had declared himself on his arrival in France. These mix-ups and recriminations might perhaps be explicable in terms of Voline's circumstances at the time when he was drafting most of these notes: under the German occupation, in Marseilles, he had every reason to fear the Gestapo and the Petainist *Milice* and well knew the rigors and deprivation of clandestine life. However it seems to us that the key to the animosity between the pair can be traced to the contrast to which we referred earlier between the activist peasant and the moralizing intellectual unconnected with social practice.<sup>11</sup> Voline appears also to have nurtured resentment because he recalled that in Berlin in 1925, seeing Makhno again for the first time in several years, he told him that "Arshinov, an intellectual and Makhno a peasant" were a "team" and that they had to remain "inseparable." Makhno supposedly would not listen to him<sup>12</sup> and "threw it all up" by "getting maybe more drunk than before." His was "undoubtedly a nature with the talents of a genius, capable of actively and doggedly pursuing whatever goal he had set himself, a man who had a marvelous know-how and who could at the same time topple from such heights into the deepest depths, until he turned into a 'human derelict'(!)" (Page 75.) Likewise, in the Ukraine he had refused to suffer his "moral influence" (page 142) preferring that of the "camarilla" made up of a section of the Makhnovist commanders. For all his "qualities," Makhno remained, as far as Voline was concerned, "an ignorant, uncultivated, uneducated fellow" (page 60), especially as he had an "aversion to anything that was not peasant. Being himself 100 percent peasant, he was completely familiar with peasant life and inclined to criticize anyone who was not a peasant. He did not have much confidence in workers because the worker, according to him, had already been so to speak demoralized by the mad, bad life in the towns and in industry where he stood alongside the bosses. He had even less confidence in intellectuals and poked fun at them. Given that, it was very hard to talk to him about the flaws of his organization because he retorted with all sorts of mockery that left you nonplussed and denied you every chance of settling matters one way or another." (Page 134.) Elsewhere, Voline mentions these traits of Makhno's character even more explicitly: "blind *confidence* in the peasantry, *distrust* of all the other classes of society: a certain *contempt* for intellectuals, even anarchist ones." (Page 49.)

This is the nub of the matter and the spot where the knife went into Voline! As a "morally irreproachable" intellectual, he had high hopes of acting as a keeper of conscience, in order to steer it along the "right road." Instead of which Makhno had refused his advice, perhaps mockingly, in order to fall back upon his base instincts as a "muzhik"! As if to confirm this, whilst in exile in Paris, Voline one day labeled him a muzhik (which must have been an insult equivalent

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<sup>11</sup> *Nestor Makhno, le cosaqu de l'Anarchie* pp. 323–326 and 358–360

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he did not agree with the definition of this anarchist "holy trinity"?

in his eyes to “ignorant brute” or some such) and an anarchist honor board had to be assembled to smooth over the falling out.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, out of the 236 hand-written pages supposedly dealing with Makhno, only a very few relate directly to the subject, most being given over to all manner of digressions. To back up his criticisms, Voline cites some specific instances in which he was an eye-witness or a protagonist: the remainder is only impressions, hearsay evidence and inconsequential confidences from Makhno’s wife, which seems little very slight basis for the gravity of the charges he brings. It strikes us as obvious then that the credence to be placed in these should be measured alongside the degree of enmity that he bore Makhno. He would have been better advised to describe in detail, not just a few episodes, but the entirety of his time with the Makhnovist insurgents, unless he spent that time “cloistered” in his cultural activities and deliberately avoided mingling with the “muzhiks” and speaking directly and pertinently to them, without having to rely upon second-hand information. He could also have reviewed the circumstances that prefaced his arrival in the insurgent camp: it was Makhno in person who despatched a detachment to rescue him from the clutches of the Petliurist partisans. It was also at the suggestion and instigation of Makhno that he was appointed chairman of the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the insurgent movement for several months, and again Makhno who made his release one of the conditions upon the implementation of the military and political treaty agreed with the Bolsheviks in 1920. He also omits to mention the “deposition” he made before a Chekist investigating magistrate, a “deposition” critical, to say the least, of the Makhnovists, for soviet historians have since used it to discredit them.<sup>14</sup>

In substance, all of these random jottings, awash with sweeping generalizations, strike us as revealing more about the author’s personality than about Makhno’s: which is probably why they have remained unpublished thus far. However, despite their obvious exaggerations, these texts deserve to be better known, as certain passages from them are of definite value for the period. As for Makhno’s “true” personality, that emerges sufficiently from all his writings — memoirs and articles alike — for us to avoid reference to the anarchist “rumor mill” in search of further “sensational” disclosures.

In the context of this bibliographical update, let us note the oral testimony of the historian Oleg Koshchuk, who is of Ukrainian extraction. His mother was interned in Poland in the same camp as Makhno and remembers that certain Petliurists wanted to attempt the libertarian’s life, probably remembering some skirmish that went against them. At which point, it was intimated to them by highly placed nationalist leaders that any move against Makhno would be construed as an act of hostility towards the Ukrainian cause. Despite their political differences, ethnic solidarity came into play here to unite Ukrainians from both banks of the river Dniepr.

Retrieved on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from [www.spunk.org](http://www.spunk.org)

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<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the meeting can be found in the papers of Rene Fuchs. See Archives Jean Maitron.

<sup>14</sup> Not that this stopped them from upbraiding him as well: the most recent one, Semanov, even alleges, apropos his “editing” of Makhno’s Memoirs, that he “was a parasite” on Makhno. S.N. Semanov “The Makhnovshchina and its collapse” in *Voprosy Istorii* (Questions of History) Moscow, 1966, No. 9, p. 52 (note 81). Let us point out also a little known something: Voline’s brother, Boris Eichenbaum (1886–1959) was the theoretician of the “formalist” school, and later an important literary critic under the Stalin regime.

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# **The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine**

**(March 1917 – April 1918)**

Nestor Makhno

1926

# Introduction

Although the Russian anarchists of the past are still alive in our hearts today, their actual historical and human experiences seem far off in the night of time. We are talking about only a few decades, yet it is as though the dust of centuries has piled up on these events, preventing us from understanding them. Always victorious in battle, Makhno appears as a fearless knight galloping invincible at the head of the Ukrainian insurgents, first against the white Russians of Denikin or Wrangel, then against Trotsky's Red Army.

Given that the need for revolutionary myths still persists among comrades, things might just stop there. Any romanticised attempt which borders on or even duplicates historical interpretation helps us to live and sometimes to die. But is that really what we want in bringing out this volume?

I don't know. When narrating events of the past, especially those that touch us deeply, it seems indispensable to bear the present day and the air breathed by those who still dream of revolution in mind. If this means anything, it means picking up the threads where they were broken off, taking them from comrades who rebelled so long ago and continuing to weave them under different conditions.

And some people are still fascinated by the big organisation today, just as Makhno—and even more so his closest comrade, Archinov—were in the past. A strong organisation doted with means and men, strategies and detailed programmes, with a high-sounding name and capable of making fierce proclamations and throwing the forces of repression into a panic simply breathing revenge or by merely threatening to shoot fascinates them. The more the movement is lacerated by a thousand internal misunderstandings and diatribes with each one accusing the other of respectability and a lowering of the guard, and words lose their meaning and take on the recondite, almost cryptographical ones dictated by suspicion, the more the organisation and its continual reinforcement becomes a panacea for all evils. The prosthesis extends its malefic shadow, making us feel strong; then, in this new-found strength suspicion is cast on the comrades who were bold enough to refuse and criticise the former as they saw it as nothing but an alibi and a further sign of weakness.

In this first volume of Makhno's memoirs finally published here in English there is constant reference to the Russian anarchists' lack of organisation and effectiveness, remarking that things would have been different (starting from May 1917) if a strong organisation had existed and functioned properly. Thus Makhno writes, 'In the aforementioned coup d'état in Petrograd, Moscow and other industrial towns, anarchists played an exceptionally salient part in the van of the sailors, soldiers and workers. But, for want of structures, they were unable to bring to bear upon the country a revolutionary influence comparable with that of these two parties which had formed a political bloc under the direction of that same guileful Lenin and knew precisely what they had to set about above all else at that time, and the degree of strength and energy at their disposal.' (Part two, Ch. 1)

In fact, as I have pointed out on various occasions, the question of the strong organisation is not only a false problem in the context of the Russian anarchists, but is so generally. I am not underestimating the organisational problem in saying that, merely pointing out that the question of the revolution cannot simply be solved with a clash between two organisations and a final victory for the revolutionary forces.

The more the years pass and capital develops new ways of modernising and restructuring in order to solve problems that seemed insurmountable in the past, the more one realises that it is not at the level of (military and productive) organisational strength that it is necessary to act, but in quite a different sphere. Both the strictly military efforts of the revolutionary struggle and the creation of new productive forms and their capacity to find different solutions, must come through the generalisation of the struggle, i.e. with the widest participation of the masses in the many ways that this is possible.

The Russian comrades—and Makhno's text is obviously impregnated with the revolutionary atmosphere of the time—did not see what is quite obvious to us today. For them the answer was to reinforce the organisation. Makhno said it on more than one occasion, then Archinov was to take the question to its extreme consequences. It would be quite pointless to repeat this today simply because it is bathed in the aura of revolutionary prestige of a great guerrilla fighter. We should not read the following pages like a technical exercise, but rather in the critical light of practice, the only thing that matters for anarchists who are thinking about what needs to be done today instead of talking about what should have been done yesterday.

In the memoirs we are presenting we also come across the latent problem of the 'popular front'. This is actually present throughout the whole narrative, although it only comes to the surface a few times. Makhno writes: '...in spite of the paradox, we should have decided to form a united front with the statist forces. Faithful to anarchist principles we should have been able to overcome all the contradictions and, once the forces of reaction had been destroyed, we would have widened and deepened the course of the Revolution for the greater good of submitted humanity.' (Part Two, end of chapter V). The many forces struggling against the repression—who were always on the point of taking power themselves—include the Ukrainian and Bolshevik socialist revolutionaries and the independentists, who were all different from the strictly military point of view. There can be no doubt that in a situation where one is faced with a common enemy, as was to happen later in Spain, anarchists had to decide whether to struggle alone or to participate in a common 'front' with the other so-called opponents of the raging reaction. The result has always been controversial. There have been (and still are) those who support the united front, and there have been (and still are) those who favour the autonomy of the struggle, that is the specific anarchist organisation with mass structures where anarchists find themselves alongside the people in struggle, not in party-style apparatuses or in specific structures led by functionaries more or less disguised as populist leaders.

This problem risks going the same way as the preceding one. Those who allow themselves to be fascinated by efficiency, believing that the only possible solution to the weakness and inefficiency of anarchists is a strong organisation, could not fail to welcome 'fronts' that (apparently) favour and increase this efficiency. The outcome is unavoidable. The way to frontist militarism is paved. In fact, the bigger the actions carried out the more significant they will appear to the deformed eye of the militaristic point of view. The more this decision is re-enforced, the further one will move from the practices that make the anarchist generalisation of the struggle possible.

A careful consideration of events should lead to different solutions, especially in the light of the Russian and Spanish experiences. I would not say an *a posteriori* refusal of frontism so much as the systematic, preventive decision to attack any authoritarian attempt to control revolutionary forces immediately, no matter where it comes from or with what name it tries to disguise itself. Right from the start of the revolution. This is possible and would reduce the danger of counter-revolutionaries concealing themselves among revolutionaries, because at first their forces are minimal. It is only a question of a few individuals in small, barely visible groups within the rising tide of the generalisation of the clash, chaos and destruction. This is the time to prevent those little islands of authoritarian corruption from gradually gaining strength and taking advantage of the inevitable reduction in revolutionary tension and throwing discredit on all the self-organised forms, proposing those controlled by the party functionaries. But this preventive action can only be brought about by anarchist comrades who have no illusions about big organisations but see the organisational problem differently: small unities, simple base nuclei consisting of anarchists and non-anarchists and linked by informal structures alongside the actions of anarchist groups based on affinity. In a word, an agile, informal organisation with nothing of the heaviness of the big federations which claim to manage the new world that opens up with the advent of the revolution. This perspective is therefore based on the autonomy of the struggle.

Such autonomy implies an informal orientation, not one unique front to put fear into the repressive forces. Repression, as we know by bitter experience, is never afraid unless it finds itself up against the wall. Moreover, as Makhno's case demonstrates, the informal organisation of base nuclei structured autonomously with minimal coordination turned out to be the best response to the repression, thereby dispelling his own organisational preoccupations, at least at a military level. Unfortunately, it is difficult to uproot the efficientist model from the minds of comrades who uphold the authoritarianism of the past, from the Jacobins to the Marxists, that still survives here and there in the world, leading to the last ditch of resistance of oppressed peoples. This model also still circulates among anarchists as we continue in our little performances that attempt to imitate the verbal truculence of days gone by, but without the force of events that assisted and reinforced that truculence. If history was once a tragedy, when it repeats itself it becomes a farce.

But let us return to the question of organisation

The present writer is not against organisation as such. In fact, I have always maintained that there is a need for organisation, otherwise it would be impossible to act even to create the initial conditions of individual autonomy essential to the growth of the revolutionary process.. But that does not say much. Organisation is a means and, within certain limits, it multiplies the strength of the individual, producing a new collective strength which single individuals could never hope to gain from the mere sum of the desires of all. That said, however, this strength can be wasted and get lost in the meandering of an involuntary bureaucracy that ends up suffocating it. The wider and more articulated the organisation becomes, the more a network of ramifications and reciprocal control develops, obstructing the very efficiency one was looking for at the start.

Moreover, once this road has been undertaken there is no turning back. In other words, there is no way to mitigate the consequences of an organisational hypertrophy. One would not get a better organisation by reducing controls and ramifications, merely an ineffective one, that is to say, a dead weight, something that it would be better to get rid of.

An informal organisation that is created autonomously and is free from any external restraints or internal organisation charts, must be born informally. It cannot wait for a magic wand to be waved, or for the work of some theoretician, to make it such.

The other essential point is permanent conflict: waiting for some individual or committee to give practical indications or theoretical illumination on where and how to attack not waiting for unanimous decisions or federal ratification, but attacking right away on the basis of the decisions of the single affinity groups or base nuclei with minimal links between them. It was not by chance that Makhno, who created uncontaminated sympathy for the anarchist guerrilla throughout almost the whole of this century, was called "Batko", i.e. "Father" by his comrades, a name given to every "condottiere" in Russia. There, as elsewhere, if one does not want to accept a role (and the people have very schematic ideas on the subject), one should not put oneself in the position of not being able to refuse it.

Makhno himself, when speaking of his relations with the peasants' movement refers, '...it was agreed on all sides that the initiatives should always come from me and that I should always hold the reins of these various institutions.' (Part One Ch 7)

As a charismatic figure the 'condottiere', even if he is determined not to abuse his power, i.e. not use it to reinforce his own personal privilege (and this is undoubtedly the case of Makhno who died in poverty in a hospital in Paris) is nevertheless a 'condottiere', and his credibility, from which his fame derives and grows, comes from the fact that he is capable of leading people to victory. But what does this leading to victory mean? At the strictly military level it means resolving an armed conflict, killing more enemies than they do us. This kind of accountancy always ends registering a loss. No one wins, everyone is defeated. The only moral justification for attack is the need to destroy the enemy, not to gain victory over him. These two aspects have often been confused. Destroying the enemy means making his projects of control and dominion impossible, establishing a new world that is something *else*, even though it has to pass through the narrow door of that destruction. A new world cannot be conquered with victory. Taking over everything that the enemy possesses, even his life, does not lead to building a better world if one continues to think with the same concepts, albeit in a different hue. We build a new world differently, by carrying different ideas and feelings in our hearts, here and now, not by burying our enemies and emulating the apparent successes of a power apparatus that dominates us and dreaming it capable of working time in our favour this time and supporting our weaknesses.

For anarchists there is no such thing as victory. There is no such thing as a free society that is capable of appearing completely in the future, like Athena from Jove's head. Perhaps nothing of that society exists yet in anarchist theoretical elaboration. Perhaps it will never be visible, no matter how many victories we accumulate by strengthening our organisations or dreaming of others better able to respond to the needs of the revolution. To win at the military level is no more than a peripheral satisfaction, a sigh of relief, a gloomy patch of light in the blind alley where the heads of the enemies who have always persecuted us start to fall. And then? What will we find in our hearts then? What will we build the society of tomorrow from, if not from the little freedom we have managed to imbue into the very means of destruction we use today? What would have happened if the anarchists had succeeded in defeating the Red Army and the model of Makhnovist free communes had spread all over Russia? Perhaps the free society would have taken hold and developed and we would not have seen all the horrors of real socialism? Perhaps. But only thanks to the presence of other creatively different forces developed by that communarian nucleus from the start, which would only have become significant had one been able to

immediately get rid of all illusions of a popular front. In the case of the contrary, the anarchists would behave been ‘condottieri’ like any other sufficiently ideologised party bureaucrat.

To remain prisoners of the ideology of victory means not understanding that any active minority, no matter who they are, can ever really win, as this very victory means the defeat of any possibility of generalised freedom. If we want to talk about winning it must be the masses in revolt, in the first place freely associated in new social creations capable of giving life to incredible different vital formations of a kind that no fantasy, no matter how wild, is capable of imagining from within the repressive rind that oppresses and surrounds us. If winning means a minority of specialists assisted by groups of people sensitised by propaganda to the new ideals who are enduring the new ideas, this enduring will be all the more terrible the more the new carriers of truth are convinced that they have the best possible solution to the social question. There is no worse oppressor than virtue in the place of vice.

So if on the one hand organisational problems are important so as not to consign ourselves to the repression unarmed, on the other they need to be seen for what they are, a means like any other and not the main objective. The struggle has many nuances and only one objective: to act in such a way that it generalises as far as possible. This is the real task of revolutionaries: to begin to develop the struggle, taking on the task and difficulties of the beginning, understanding what everyone else takes longer to see. They must pass to the attack without delay, avoiding falling prey to the illusion of a match fought by two sides with the repression on the one side and the active minority (more or less aware of its own limits and potential) on the other.

This task is inseparably linked to the other of the link between agricultural and industrial production, often indicated in Makhno’s text as the solution to the economic problem given the period in the relations to be established and guaranteed between comrades and towns. So he writes: ‘The meeting dwelt on this theme: the effecting of changes between town and village without recourse to the good offices of the political authorities of the State. The example had been set: without middlemen, the villages could get to know the town better; and the town the villages. Thus two classes of toilers would come to agreement upon this common objective: the removal from the State of all authority in public functions and the abolition of its social authority—in short, its elimination.

The more this grandiose notion spread among the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region, and the more the latter embraced it, the more they made a stand in the struggle against all of the authoritarian principles which were a hindrance to it. They were trying to establish the theoretical value of such direct exchanges between toilers and sought a means of concretely securing their right to engage in them.

At the same time they divined in this the possibility of effectively undermining the capitalist traits of the Revolution, survivals from tsarist times. So that whenever all of the cloth received had been distributed, the populace of Golyai-Polye looked forward to the inclusion of all basic necessities in quantities adequate to serve the entire region in these exchanges. This would have proved that the Revolution had not only to busy itself with the destruction of the basis of the bourgeois capitalist regime but had also given consideration to prescribing in a hard and fast manner the groundwork of a new, egalitarian society wherein the toilers’ self-awareness might grow and develop.’(Part Two, Chapter 10)

This problem has now become very complex, and many comrades prefer to see it only in its aspects of development, or capitalist restructuring. But during the revolutionary phase where many of the essential aspects that guarantee the functioning of capital under the current regime, for

example the prevalence of the structures and mechanisms for financial transactions, the problem would become essential again. Many aspects of the information technology of today would become quite unusable, so a considerable part of production would come to be blocked or destroyed, i.e. the part that cannot quickly be led back to the management of production or consumerism based on the most simple if not primordial, administrative mechanisms.

Once again it is not a question of forcibly imposing a functioning model such as free self-managed exchange as that this model, which anarchists have always been carriers of, could turn out to be inapplicable in future conditions of struggle where unclear interests, confused mixtures in the course of transition, are kept alive by the reactionary forces of capital. If the objective is anarchist communism, the means for reaching it beyond the destructive event are not yet known apart from giving good solutions such as 'taking the lot', with all their limitations. Here again it is not a question of winning, but of making a social formation of which we know almost nothing, function. We cannot start off from the simple substitution of property from capitalist to communist, assuming that the means of production will continue to function in the same way. Modern information technology has made that impossible.

It is therefore not a question of putting ourselves at the head of the old firms and proceeding in a better (more politically correct) way than the capitalists did. In the same way, it is not a question of having the stronger military structure, and therefore winning. Such problems, as fascinating as they are painful, are all there before us in these Memoirs which are a good occasion for thinking about them again, certainly not for deluding ourselves or resolving them.

Alfredo M. Bonanno

# Foreward

The book we are presenting here is a reissue of the first volume of the memoirs of Nestor Makhno, *The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine*. The volume first appeared in French in 1927, before its appearance in a Russian language edition in 1929. Today it is nowhere to be found and does not even feature in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale. This is the text which we have reprinted. It covers the period from March 1917 to April 1918.

The second and third volumes, on the other hand, have never been translated into nor published in French, save for two excerpts from volume two... ‘My conversation with Svendlov’ and ‘My meeting and conversation with Lenin’, which date from June 1918 and which, in translations by Marcel Body, were included in my anthology of anarchism, *Ni Dieu ni Maitre*.<sup>1</sup>

It is our intention to publish the yet unpublished French translation of the second and third volumes in the wake of the first volume, which were published in Russian in Paris in 1936 and 1937 respectively. Volume two covers the period from April to June 1918, the third the period from July to December 1918. Makhno did not pursue his memoirs beyond the latter date. The second and third volumes will contain prefaces and notes by Voline whose own monumental *The Unknown Revolution (1917–1921)* which we have already published as part of the same *Changer la Vie* collection, back in early 1969.

At the same time as issuing French translations of the second and third volumes of Makhno’s memoirs, our collection will be bringing out an unpublished biography of Nestor Makhno by the English writer Malcolm Menzies, entitled *Makhno une épopée*, where, above all, a superb psychological profile of the hero of the ‘makhnovshchina’ will be outlined.

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Pending publication of that biography, let us briefly review the essential milestones of Makhno’s life. He was born on 27 October 1889 into a family of poor peasants in the village of Gulyai-Polye<sup>2</sup> in the Aleksandrovsk district, in the Ekaterinoslav jurisdiction, which is to say, in the Southern Ukraine.

His father died when he was just 10 months old and his mother was left alone to raise her 5 small children. At the age of 7 we find young Nestor tending the cows and sheep of the village’s peasants. The next year he entered the communal school while continuing to work as a shepherd during the summer.

He was 12 when he had to give up schooling and leave his family in order to seek employment as a farm-hand with some estate owners of German extraction, quite numerous in Ukraine in those days. Subsequently, he found employment as a caster in the Gulyai-Polye foundry.

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<sup>1</sup> Published by La Cité, Lausanne,—pocket edition in 3 volumes in the ‘Petite collection Maspéro (1970). AK edition, 2 vols. See also KSL pamphlet. AK edition, 2 vols (also KSL pamphlet)

<sup>2</sup> See the appendix for Nestor Makhno’s own note on Gulyai-Polye.

The 1905 Revolution drew this 16 year old adolescent into the social struggle. From that moment he became a libertarian communist. Three years later he was arrested and sentenced to death for membership of anarchist organisations and involvement in terrorist activities. But the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He served his time in the Butyrki, Moscow's central prison. He availed of his lengthy captivity to further his education with the aid of his cell-mate, the better educated Piotr Arshinov. Above all he read Bakunin and Kropotkin. Frequently put in solitary for his rebellious attitudes, he contracted tuberculosis of the lung. The Russian revolution finally freed him on 1 March 1917.

Makhno hastened home to his native village where the peasants indicated that they were well-disposed towards him and they placed their trust in him. He thus became chairman of the region's Peasant Union, the farming commission, the union of metalworkers and woodworkers and finally, and above all, chairman of the local soviet of peasants and workers.

The Ukraine having been occupied by Austro-German armed forces, the former landlords found the lands which the peasants had seized from them since the 1917 Revolution restored to their ownership. The farm workers defended their recent gains by taking up arms. Makhno raised workers' and peasants' militias which spearheaded the fight against both the occupiers and the Ukrainian counter-revolutionary authorities who had sided with them. A price was put on his head and he was forced to go underground. His mother's house was put to the torch and his elder brother was shot, despite his being an invalid.

In June 1918 Nestor Makhno visited Moscow to consult with leading anarchist militants concerning how to conduct revolutionary libertarian activity in the South-Ukrainian peasant milieu. It was on this occasion that he was received in the Kremlin and there met the then secretary-general of the Communist Party, Sverdlov, and Lenin himself.

The first feat of arms by the man who was to become a great libertarian guerrilla fighter was the capture of Gulai-Polye at the end of September 1918. One consequence of the armistice of 11 November 1918 which concluded the Great War was the withdrawal of the occupying forces, and Makhno simultaneously availed himself of the opportunity to stockpile arms and supplies.

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For the first time in history, the principles of libertarian communism were put into practice in Soviet Ukraine and, insofar as the circumstances of civil war allowed, self-management was practiced. Lands wrested from the old estate owners were worked in common by the peasants, banded together in "communes" or "free labour societies" in which the precepts of fraternity and equality were observed. Everyone, man, woman or child, had to labour according to their abilities. Comrades elected on a temporary basis to managerial positions, then resumed their usual work alongside the other members of the commune.

Each soviet was merely the executor of the wishes of the peasants of the locality who had elected it. Production units were federated by district and the districts federated by region. The soviets were knit into an overall economic system based upon social equality. They had to be absolutely independent of every political party. No politician was to impose his will there under cover of the power of the soviet. Their members had to be authentic toilers, serving the interests of the labouring masses and none other.

When the Makhnovist partisans entered a district they put up posters which read:

‘The liberty of the peasants and workers is theirs and may not be impinged upon. It is up to the peasants and workers themselves to act, to organise, to come to some arrangement among themselves in every facet of their lives, as they themselves perceive and wish... (...). The Makhnovists can only help them by offering them this or that advice or counsel. (...) But in no circumstances can they govern them, nor do they wish to.’

When later, in autumn 1920, Makhno’s men were induced to enter into—on an equal footing—an ephemeral accord with the Bolshevik authorities, they were insistent that the following rider be adopted:

‘In the region where the Makhnovist army is to operate, the worker and peasant population is to create its free institutions for economic and political self-administration. These institutions are to be autonomous and linked on a federal basis, through compacts, with the governmental organs of the soviet republics.’

Dumbfounded, the Bolshevik negotiators deleted this rider from the agreement so as to refer it to Moscow where, of course, it was adjudged ‘absolutely inadmissible’.

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One of the comparative weaknesses of the Makhnovist movement was the dearth of libertarian intellectuals it contained. But, intermittently at any rate, it did have help from outside. First of all from Kharkov and Kursk, through the anarchists who had amalgamated at the end of 1918 into a combine known as the Nabat (the alarm) of which Voline was the leading light. In April 1919, they held a congress at which they came out ‘...categorically and definitively against any participation in the soviets, these having become purely political organisms, organised on authoritarian, centralist, statist lines’. This pronouncement was regarded by the Bolshevik government as a declaration of war and Nabat had to cease all its activities.

Subsequently, in July, Voline managed to reach Makhno’s headquarters, where, in concert with Piotr Archinov, he took charge of the movement’s cultural and educational service. He chaired one of its congresses, the one held in Aleksandrovsk that October. At it some general theses spelling out the doctrine of the ‘free soviets’ were adopted. Unfortunately those theses have been lost to us.

The congresses of the Makhnovshchina brought together both the peasants’ delegates and the combatant’s delegates. Indeed, the civilian organisation was the extension of an insurgent peasant army practising guerrilla tactics. It was remarkably mobile, capable of covering up to 100 kilometres per day, not only by virtue of its cavalry but also thanks to its infantry who moved around on light spring-loaded horse-drawn vehicles. This army was organised upon the essentially libertarian principles of volunteer troops, the elective principle (which applied to all ranks) and discipline freely assented to. The rules of the latter, devised by teams of partisans then endorsed by general assemblies, were stringently observed by all.

Makhno’s guerrillas harassed the interventionist White armies. As for the Bolsheviks’ Red Guard units, which were soon to be incorporated into a Red Army, these were quite ineffectual. They fought according to the tired old canons of classic bourgeois warfare venturing only along the railroad tracks without ever sallying from their armoured trains, falling back at the first reversal and often neglecting to take all of their own fighters aboard again. Thus they instilled little confidence in the peasants who, isolated in their villages and bereft of weapons, might have been at the mercy of the counter-revolutionaries. ‘The honour of having annihilated Denikin’s

counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919 belongs chiefly to the anarchist insurgents,' wrote Piotr Arshinov, the chronicler of the Makhnoshchina.

But Makhno refused to place his army under the supreme command of Trotsky, the head of the Red Army. So Trotsky turned against Makhno's guerrillas. On 4 June 1919, he drafted an order whereby he banned the forthcoming congress of the Makhnovists whom he accused of setting themselves up against the authority of the soviets in the Ukraine, and he stigmatised any involvement in the congress as an act of 'high treason', ordering that its delegates be arrested. Embarking upon a procedure which the Spanish Stalinists were to espouse 18 years later against the anarchist brigades, he denied arms to Makhno's partisans, evading the duty to render them assistance so as to go on to accuse them of 'betrayal' and of letting themselves be beaten by the White troops. No matter how much respect may be due the memory of that great revolutionary Leon Trotsky, this negative page in his prestigious career should not be glossed over in silence.

Nevertheless, the two armies came to an arrangement on two occasions, whenever the seriousness of the interventionist peril made it imperative that they act in concert, and this came to pass, first in March 1919 against Denikin and then during the summer and autumn of 1920 when there was a threat by Wrangel's white forces which Makhno eventually routed. But as soon as the perceived danger was no more, the Red Army resumed its military operations against Makhno's guerrillas who answered blow for blow.

At the end of November 1920, the Bolshevik authorities had no scruples about orchestrating an ambush. The officers of the Makhnovist army of the Crimea were invited to take part in a military consultation, whereupon they were promptly arrested by the political police, the cheka, and either shot without any semblance of a trial, or disarmed. At the same time a full scale offensive was launched again at Gulyai-Polye. The contest, an increasingly lopsided one between libertarians and 'authoritarians', between a traditional army and a guerrilla force, lingered on for 9 more months. In the end, rendered *hors de combat* by forces that were far superior in number and equipment, Makhno had to give up the contest. He managed to flee to Rumania in August 1921 and thence to reach Paris, where he was to die in July 1935, ailing and impoverished.

One may share the view with Piotr Arshinov that the Makhnovshchina was the prototype of an independent movement of the peasant masses, while our own view is that it was a forerunner of revolutionary guerrilla warfare of the 20th century variety as prosecuted by the Chinese, the Cubans, the Algerians and the Vietnamese.

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For a long time, with the exception of M. Kubanin's comparatively objective and well-documented book in Russian, the Makhno episode has been passed over in silence or violently misrepresented in the USSR. However, there are intimations of a new approach. Indeed in No 7 of the soviet review *Nory Mir* in 1969, an interview was published, dating from 1935. This interview was with one Stepan Dybetz who headed the USSR automobile industry. An erstwhile metalworker and anarchist, he defected to bolshevism in the autumn of 1918. With a measure of gratitude, Dubetz tells how he met Makhno. His account, some 63 pages long, covers the period from the spring of 1918 up to November 1919. Dybetz's wife had also been an anarchist and, unlike her husband, has remained such. She had previously been in prison in Odessa with the young Makhno in 1905, and Makhno had forgotten nothing of that past. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

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Makhno began his military activity in the capacity of batko-ataman (head of a small detachment of partisans). He mounted several daring raids behind the White's lines. He put his daring and inventive mind to work, and gradually his reputation grew among the peasants. In this there may perhaps have been a shortcoming on the part of the young soviet authorities which assured him of popularity as a hero and even went so far as to countenance the description of his several thousand-strong troops as a 'Batko Makhno Brigade'.

After Makhno was declared an outlaw by the soviet command of which Dybetz was himself a member, Dybetz and his wife Rosa were one day captured along with other Red Army commanders and commissars by Makhno's men. The latter brought them to Makhno's headquarters.

In the village of Dobrovelichka, Makhno, astride a white charger, greeted the army of prisoners which Kalashnikov brought him. He was of medium height and wore his hair long, and wore a sort of military busby. Kalashnikov and he embraced. Our carts had also drawn to a halt. Finger pointing to us, Kalashnikov said:

*—Look! I bring you the staff of a combat sector.*

*Makhno did not even deign to look at us.*

*—Well then, shoot the lot!*

*Whereupon the anarchist Uralov said:*

*—What? Shoot them? When the Dybetz's are among them, man and wife?*

*—Ah, the Dybetz's! Fetch them here!*

*I was brought before Makhno.*

*Hello, Dybetz.*

*—Hello Makhno.*

*How do you come to be here Dybetz?*

*—Your valiant army dragged me to you like a wild beast in a cage.*

*He smiled.*

*—You know that I now shoot communists, for they have outlawed me?*

*—Well, there you have it. I cannot raise my hand against this old turncoat. Maybe it's weakness on my part, but I will not shoot him. And I order that not a hair on his head be harmed wherever my armies may be. Anyone who lifts his hand against him is to be shot by me personally. Understood?*

*—Understood.*

*—Release Dybetz and his wife and hold the others at my disposal.*

Dybetz and his wife were to be arrested on another occasion but were once again released on Makhno's orders.

Daniel Guerin

## By Way of a Preface...

*I believe a few introductory comments may be of use just as this, the first volume of *The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine* is on the verge of publication.*

*First, I must alert the reader to the absence of a number of important documents which ought to have figured within—resolutions and proclamations from the Gulyai-Polye Peasant's Union, from the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, and their direct inspiration, Gulyai-Polye's peasant anarchist-communist group.*

*With admirable consistency that group set itself the aim of rallying the peasants and workers of the region beneath its banner. Ever in the van, it offered them guidance, explaining to them the meaning and moment of the events that were taking place and disclosing to them the aims of the toilers generally and those of the anarchist-communists, more closely attuned to the peasant mind, in particular.*

*It is likewise a matter of regret that I do not have the photographs of the peasant anarchist-communist group of Gulyai-Polye that I should have liked to see occupy pride of place among the documents bearing on the Russian revolution in the Ukraine, on the Makhnovist movement spawned by that revolution, the principles which directed it and, finally, the acts which were the consequence of them, alongside short biographical notes.*

*I would honestly have liked to insert in the pages which follow the portraits of these unknown revolutionaries sprung from the very bosom of the Ukrainian people, revolutionaries who, at my instigation and under my supervision, managed to create among the toilers that broad and powerful revolutionary movement at whose head the black flags of the Makhnovists fluttered.*

*Unfortunately I have not yet been able to lay hands on these documents which I will make public as soon as this is feasible for me, so that they may be placed before the toilers of the entire world to await their verdict.*

*My account is wholly consistent with the historical facts whether these relate to the Russian revolution generally or to our role in particular. They will be open to challenge only by those 'historians' who played no effective part in the events described in these memoirs and who, though having remained aloof from the revolution have nonetheless successfully passed themselves off, by the written or spoken word, as people with a thoroughgoing familiarity with all of the minutiae of the great revolution in the estimation of foreign revolutionaries.*

*Such criticisms we will always be able to rebut, for they are built upon sand, and these 'experts' know naught of what they speak, nor against whom they rant.*

*My sole regret is that these memoirs are not being published in the Ukraine and are not appearing in Russian, nor in Ukrainian. This failing is a product of circumstances against which I can avail nothing.*

*The revolution of February 1917 cast wide the gates of Russia's political prisons.*

*Having taken to the streets armed, some blue-shirted, some wearing the grey soldier's cap, the workers and peasants assuredly made a significant contribution to the outcome. From the outset, these toilers had to face up to the Statist socialists who, in concert with the liberal bourgeoisie, had*

*already formed a Provisional ‘revolutionary’ government and were striving to keep the revolutionary upheaval on the path which it had marked out for it.*

*Then the toilers demanded an immediate amnesty, the first step in any revolution. And the Social Revolutionary A. Kerensky, the Justice minister, bowed to their wishes.*

*Within a few days, all political detainees had been set free and resumed, among the masses of town and countryside, the propaganda activity which they had hitherto engaged in clandestinely in the unbearable atmosphere of the tsarist regime.*

*As for other political prisoners—whom the government of the tsar and of the pomeschiki had immured in dank dungeons, hoping thereby to deprive the mass of toilers of their most advanced elements and thus to stifle any hint of denunciation of the regime’s iniquity—I had my freedom restored to me too.*

*Sentenced to life imprisonment, shackled, frequently ill, eight and a half years of incarceration had nonetheless failed to crush my faith in the anarchist cause. Convinced as ever of the coming victory of free labour, equality and solidarity over the slavery created by State and Capital, I emerged from the Butyrki on 2 March 1917 and set to work again two days later, right there in Moscow in the Lefortovo anarchist group. Also, I had not forgotten our own Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group, founded 10 or 12 years previously and which was, or so my comrades said, still active despite the loss of many leading militants.*

*I was very much aware of the inadequacies of my theoretical education and of my ignorance of the positive data that might have enabled me resolve social and political issues from an anarchist viewpoint. To be sure, I knew that this was so of nine out of every ten people in our circles: the schools that should have been likely to supply this sort of grounding were cruelly lacking. Nonetheless I was profoundly aware of this shortcoming and endlessly exercised by it.*

*Only the hope that this state of affairs would not endure offered me any consolation and heartened me once more: I was, in fact, firmly convinced that work, open and above board, in the bosom of an intense revolutionary movement, would supply the evidence to demonstrate to anarchists the necessity of a powerful organisation capable of marshalling all anarchist forces for the fray and of building up a movement that was thoroughly coherent and aware of the goal to be achieved. Such was the future that the immense progress of the Russian revolution hinted at to me. Indeed, to my mind, anarchist activity in such times was insolubly linked to the activity of the mass of toilers, they who were most intimately concerned in the triumph of truth and freedom, in the success of another social arrangement, in the reorganisation of human society.*

*I looked forward to the powerful expansion of our movement and its influence upon the final outcome of the Revolution. This idea was especially dear to me.*

*Fortified by this staunch belief, a bare three weeks after my release, I journeyed to Gulyai-Polye where I was born, where I had lived, and where I had left so many dear ones behind. So many beloved things and where I really felt I might act usefully in the bosom of the great family of peasants in whose midst our group had been formed. Though it had lost two thirds of its members to the scaffold, the icy wastes of Siberia or to exile abroad, it was nonetheless still extant.*

*Its original core had almost wholly disappeared, but it had managed to have its ideas pervade the peasants deeply, well beyond the confines of Gulyai-Polye.*

*Great strength of will and a thoroughgoing familiarity with what anarchists pursue are needed to determine what it is possible to wring from a revolution, even a political revolution.*

*It was from here, from Gulyai-Polye, from the bosom of the mass of toilers that the formidable revolutionary strength upon which, if Bakunin, Kropotkin and others are to be believed, revolutionary*

*anarchism should lean, was to come: this it was that would indicate the means whereby to do away with the old regime of slavery and to conjure up a new one wherein slavery would not exist and wherein authority would have no place. Freedom, equality and solidarity will then be the principles that will guide men and human societies in their living and their struggling for greater happiness and prosperity.*

*That notion had never left me during my whole term of imprisonment and it was with that same thought in mind that I was now on my way home to Gulyai-Polye.*

# **Part One**

# **Chapter One: Establishing contact with the comrades and first attempts at organising revolutionary activity.**

Upon my return I met up with some former comrades from the group. It was through them that I learned that a large number had failed to heed the call. Those who came to see me were: Andrei Semenota (brother of Sasha and Prokop Semenyuta), Moshe Kalinichenko, Filip Krat, Sava Makhno, the brothers Prokop and Grigor Sharovski, Pavel Kostelev, Leon Schneider, Pavel Sokruta, Isidor Lionty, Alexis Marchenko, and Pavel Houndai (Kostelev). The old hands had been joined by some youngsters who had been group members for only two or three years: these I did not know. They used to read anarchist material and, with the aid of an offset copier they clandestinely printed proclamations which they spread all around.

And what numbers of peasant and worker sympathisers with the anarchist ideal came to see me along with them! True, I could not count upon them in the plans I was hatching for the future. No matter. Here before me were my peasant friends, these unknown anarchists, dauntless fighters incapable of lies or deceit. Theirs were real peasant natures: it was hard to win them over, but once won over, once they had grasped the idea and verified the truth of it through their own reasoning, they sang the praises of this new ideal everywhere and at every opportunity.

In truth, I thrilled with reassurance at the sight of them before me; I was moved by a feeling so lively that I conceived the intention of engaging, beginning the morning of the very next day, in active propaganda throughout the entire Gulyai-Polye region, driving out the communal Committee (the coalition government's administrative unit), disbanding the militia and thwarting the formation of any new Committee. I resolved to go into action without further ado.

Nevertheless, towards morning on March 25, when all the peasant men and women who had been arriving since the previous evening to get a glimpse of 'he returned from the dead' as they put it, had left again, all the group members held an impromptu meeting during which I did not, in fact, display so much zeal: in my address the scheme to conduct active propaganda among the peasants and workers and drive out the communal Committee was not given its due emphasis.

The comrades were startled to hear me belabour the need for our group to examine the current state of the anarchist movement in Russia more closely. The kaleidoscope of groups which existed prior to the revolution gave me no grounds for satisfaction. 'A tactic that does not have coordination as its cornerstone is fated to remain futile,' I stated. 'It is incapable of making the most of the workers' strength and of the enthusiasm of the broad masses when the revolution is in its destructive phase.'

In these conditions, anarchists who support such action either cut themselves off from such events and languish in the sectarian propaganda of the groups, or else follow in their wake, taking on only secondary tasks and thereby working to the advantage of their political adversaries.

So, in order to be able to do away with governmental institutions, to dispense in our region with all rights of private ownership of the land, the factories, manufacturers and other undertakings, we must, while taking into account the anarchist movement in the towns, draw closer to the peasant masses so as to assure ourselves of the constancy of their revolutionary enthusiasm on the one hand, and to have them feel on the other that we are with them, unshakeably committed to the ideas that we set before them in the skhods<sup>1</sup> and meetings.

That, comrades, is one of these tactical issues that we will be called upon to study in the near future. We will have to explore it in all its ramifications, for upon its solution will depend the choice of the tactic to be espoused for our activities.

This factor is all the more important for us, in that our group is the only one which has remained in contact with the peasant masses over the past eleven years. So far as I am aware, no other group exists in the neighbourhood. The urban groups of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, boast only a few survivors and in any case their precise whereabouts at present are unknown: some are allegedly in Moscow, the date of their homecoming unknown, while others seem to have left the country for Switzerland, France or America and nothing more has been heard from them. Thus we have only ourselves to rely upon.

Narrow as our familiarity with anarchist teaching may be, we must nonetheless devise upon that basis a plan of action to be undertaken in peasant circles in Gulyai Polye and region. We must set about organising a Peasant Union and place one of the peasants from our group at its head without delay. This ploy has a dual purpose: we will in this way prevent the element hostile to our political ideal from getting a foothold in it; and furthermore we will be constantly able to keep the union briefed on developments and thereby arrive at a complete understanding between it and our group.

In this manner, the peasants will be able to get to grips with the question of agrarian reform and declare the land to be under collective ownership. And that without waiting for the resolution of this question—such an eminently important one as far as they are concerned—by the ‘provisional Government’.

The comrades showed that they were happy with what they had heard. They did not endorse my approach to the subject, however.

Comrade Kalinchenko was witheringly critical of my approach, claiming that while the present revolution was in progress our role as anarchists should be to concentrate upon disseminating our ideas. Especially because such a wide scope for our activities being available, we had to avail of it solely for the purpose of getting the workers to understand our ideal without seeking to enter their organisations.

He said, ‘In this way the peasants will see that we are not seeking to bring them under our influence but that we are merely seeking to afford them an understanding of our ideas so that, drawing their inspiration from our methods and modes of action, they may build a new life with complete independence.’

It was at that point that our discussion ended, for it was 7 am. and I had to go along to the workers’ and peasants’ Skhod-rally at around 10 am., at which the chairman of the communal Committee, Prusinski, was to read a declaration from the district commissar explaining how the change of regime resulting from the Revolution was to be interpreted.

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<sup>1</sup> Skhod = assembly of the members of a commune.

We simply decided that there were grounds for subjecting my report to analysis and more detailed discussion and we separated: some comrades made their way home, while the rest stayed behind so as to attend the skhod-rally with me.

At ten o'clock I was already in the Market Square with some of them. I ran my eye over the square: the houses, the schools.

I walked into one of the latter and encountered the headmaster. We spoke at length about teaching programmes, something of which I was completely ignorant I admit. I learned that the catechism was part of the curriculum and was strenuously defended by the priests and by a section of the parents. I was outraged at this, not that that prevented me from enrolling some time later on as a member of the Friends of Education Society, a society which subsidised the schools. Indeed I said to myself that in taking an active part in its work I might manage to shake the religious foundations of the teaching.

Only towards noon did I turn up at the skhod-rally, shortly after the address by the sub-Lieutenant Prusinski, the communal Committee chairman. (At the time Gulyai Polye was host to the 8th Serbian regiment, with a detachment of Russian machine-gunners: twelve machine-guns, one hundred and forty-four men and four officers. When the above-mentioned committee had come to be formed, certain of these officers had been invited to join it. One of them, Prusinski, was elected chairman: another, Lieutenant Kudinov, headed the militia. Thus public order in Gulyai-Polye was the responsibility of these two officers.)

Winding up his speech, the Committee chairman invited me to speak in turn, to support his conclusions. I declined this suggestion and spoke on quite another matter.

In my speech, I showed the peasants how it was inconceivable that in revolutionary Gulyai-Polye there should be a communal Committee headed by outsiders to the Commune, persons who, as a result, could not be called to account for their actions. And I suggested that without delay four representatives per sotnia (Gulyai-Polye then consisted of seven districts called *sotnia*) be appointed to look into this matter and many others.

The teachers from the primary school immediately supported my proposal. The school's headmaster placed his establishment at our disposal. It was decided that each sotnia would elect its representatives and a date for the meeting was agreed.

Thus did I renew contacts with active life upon my return from incarceration.

Shortly after, I was invited by the teachers to attend their private meeting. First we got to know each other fully. One of them was a Social-Revolutionary while the remainder, about fifteen in all, belonged to no party at all for the most part. Then we tackled a series of issues relating to the inactivity of the teachers who were, however, itching to take an active role in public life and were seeking a way forward. We resolved to act in concert and, in the interests of the peasants and workers, to found a new Committee in place of the one made up of officers and kulaks<sup>2</sup> elected, not by all of the peasants, but only by the richer ones among them.

I next showed up at our group's meeting where my report, and comrade Kalinichenko's refutation of it, were discussed. In the wake of this debate it was decided that, beginning the very next day, we would start methodical propaganda among the peasants and the workers of the factories and the workshops.

Being not as yet organised, the workers were unable to set up a 'district union' of an anarchist outlook capable of usefully combating the communal Committee and were obliged, willy-nilly,

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<sup>2</sup> Kulak = peasant whose wealth derived from exploitation of other peasants.

to rally around the latter. So new elections to that Committee had to be preceded with as a matter of urgency. What is more, there had to be intense propaganda in favour of the venture in which we would be involved with a view to bringing influence to bear, thus inducing it to throw down a gauntlet to the communal Committee which was inspired by the coalition government to establish its own control over it.???

‘I see this,’ I told the comrades, ‘as a way of denying the rights of the coalition government and the very principle underlying these communal Committees. What is more, should our action along these lines be successful we will lead the peasants and workers towards a grasp of this truth: they alone, conscious of their revolutionary role, can faithfully embody the notion of autonomy without the tutelage of the political parties or of the government.

This is the ideal chance for we anarchists to search out in practice the solution to a whole series of pressing questions upon which the realisation of our ideal hangs one way or another. albeit it at the cost of many difficulties and perhaps of quite a few false steps, t

It would be an unforgivable mistake for our group to let this moment slip by, for it would thereby divorce itself from the mass of toilers. Now, that is precisely what we should fear most: for at such a time, that would be tantamount to disappearing from the revolutionary struggle and perhaps even in certain instances what would be even worse—to obliging the toilers to abandon our ideas which they are coming around to, and will come around to even more if we remain in their midst marching with them into the fray and onwards to death, or to victory and joy.’

Laughing, the comrades said:

‘Friend, you’re straying from anarchist tactics. We would have liked to hear our movement speak, just as you yourself invited us to at our first meeting.’

‘That’s right, we should listen to that voice and listen to it we will, if only there was a movement. But as yet I see none. And yet I know that we must set to work without delay. I proposed a plan of action to you. You adopted it. So what remains for us to do, if not to set to work.’

So whole weeks elapsed in futile argument. However, each one of us, in keeping with the decision reached, had already begun to work in his own manner, consonant with the plan espoused together.

## Chapter Two: Organisation of the Peasants' Union

Around midweek, the peasants' delegates came together in the schoolhouse to discuss the election of a new communal Committee.

We had prepared a report for this assembly together with some of the teachers, which one of the delegates, Kor Korpusenko, was to read. The report in question had been astutely thought out and was well written.

After consultation with the delegates of the factory workers, the peasants' delegates tabled a motion asking for fresh elections.

I added a few introductory comments to that motion in response to the wishes of the teachers Lebedev and Korpusenko.

The delegates went back to their electors and examined the aforementioned motion along with them and, as soon as the electors accepted it, a date was fixed for the elections.

Meanwhile, our group's members prepared the peasants for the organisation of the Peasants' Union.

At this point, comrade Krylov-Martinov, a delegate from the Regional Committee of the Social Revolutionary Party Peasants' Union turned up, with the intention of setting up a Peasants' Union Committee in Gulyai-Polye.

A former prisoner himself, Krylov-Martynov took an interest in my life. He came to my home and we spoke at length as he took tea with me. He ended up spending the night under my roof.

Meanwhile, I asked the members of our group to convene a skhod to lay the foundations for the organisation of the Peasants' Union.

Krylov-Martynov was a fine orator. He sketched an alluring picture to the peasants of the Social Revolutionaries' future claim to have the land restored to them without compensation—a claim which was to be pursued in the Constituent Assembly imminently due to be convened. The peasants' support was indispensable to them, so he invited the latter to join together in a Peasants' Union and support the Social Revolutionary Party.

I and several other members of our group used this speech as a starting point for spelling out our own point of view.

This is what I told them:

'We anarchists see eye to eye with the Social Revolutionaries as regards your need to organise into a Peasants' Union, but not with an eye to serving the Social Revolutionary Party as a prop in its future contest with the Social Democrats and the Cadets inside the Constituent Assembly, if it is ever summoned!

From our point of view, the Peasants' Union is necessary if the peasants are to be allowed to give their best efforts to the Revolutionary current. In this way they will widen its banks, dredging out a new and deeper bed for it so that, expanding freely, it may spread to a maximum and be effective!

The effects will be the same: the chance for the workers of town and country—whose slave labour and artificially ensnared intellect act as the pedestal of Capital and the organised banditry which is the State—to dispense with all tutelage by political parties in their lives and their struggle for liberty, as well as with their debates within the Constituent Assembly.

The peasants and workers should no longer concern themselves with the Constituent Assembly. It is the enemy of the workers of both field and town. It would be truly criminal for them to look to it for their freedom and happiness.

It is nothing but a gamble for all the political parties. Ask one of those who haunt such dens if ever anyone comes away from one without being taken for a ride?—Never! No one!

The working people, peasants and factory workers who want to send their representatives there ... would also be deceived!

At present they should not spare a thought for the Constituent Assembly, nor organise themselves in such a way as to shore up the political parties, the Social Revolutionary Party included. No! The peasants and workers alike must concern themselves with far more important issues. They must prepare themselves for the restoration of all of the land, factories and plants to the community and, on this new basis build a new life.

The Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Polye, whose foundations we are laying here, will have to work to that end.

Our attitude did not dishearten the SR delegate from the Regional Committee of the Peasants' Union. He saw fit to agree with us. And the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Polye was established that very day, March 29 1917.

Its Committee was comprised of 28 members, all peasants: I was included in their number despite my pleas to the contrary. In point of fact I was extremely busy at that time, setting up the office of our group and drafting its Declaration. In response to my pleas, the peasants decided to run me as a candidate in four districts, no less, and I was elected unanimously in each one.

The Peasants' Union Committee was thus formed, and I was elected chairman.

The next move was the enrolment of members. In the space of four or five days all the peasants enrolled without exception, apart from the ones who were landlords of course.

The latter, partisans of private ownership, broke away from the main body of peasants in the hope of forming a separate group. They managed to attract only the most ignorant of their servants to their side, and were counting on holding out until the Constituent and scoring a victory with the aid of the SDs. (At that point, the Russian Social Democrat Party was still in favour of landed property rights.)

In truth, the peasant workers had no need for the peasant proprietors' support. They looked upon them as their hereditary enemies and realised that they would only become inoffensive when their lands were declared communal property by means of forcible expropriation.

Airing this last notion among themselves with unshakeable conviction, the peasants condemned the Constituent Assembly in advance.

And so the Peasants' Union was formed, although it did not embrace all of the peasants of its commune, as a number of farms and hamlets did not belong to it. This circumstance prevented it from setting to work with enough enthusiasm to carry these other communes in its wake and wrest back lands from the pomeschiki and the State by means of organised revolutionary action, before restoring them to the community of toilers.

That is why I left Gulyai-Polye and, together with the secretary of the Union Committee, embarked upon a tour of the villages and hamlets for the purpose of setting up Peasants' Unions there.

Upon my return I reported back to the group on the work accomplished and stressed the revolutionary state of mind I had encountered everywhere and the fact that, in my view, we must give our utmost support and steer cautiously but firmly down the anarchist road.

Everyone in our group was satisfied with the results achieved and each of them recounted what he had done along those lines, and the impression our intensive propaganda was making upon the peasants, etc.

Our secretary, comrade Krat, who had stood in for me during my tour, told us of the visit to Gulyai-Polye of the new instructors come from Aleksandrovsk. They had given speeches in favour of the war and of the Constituent Assembly and had tried to have their resolutions voted through. But the workers and peasants had refused to oblige on the grounds that they were presently in the throes of organisation and that, as a result, they could not welcome any motion emanating from outsiders.

All of these manifestations of an active and conscious life inspired us with joy and confidence and kept alight our enthusiasm and our desire to press on with our revolutionary endeavour untiringly.

## Chapter Three: Police Archives Rifled

Meanwhile, those in charge of the Gulyai-Polye militia office... sublieutenant Kudinov and his secretary, the old steadfast cadet, A. Rambievski... invited me to help them rifle the police archives.

These archives were of quite exceptional interest and I asked our group to second a comrade to join me. Such was the importance that I accorded to this task that I was prepared—for the time being—to abandon any other activity in its favour. Some of my comrades, Kalinichenko and Krat especially, began by poking fun at me and my desire, they said, to rally to the aid of the militia bosses. It was only after lengthy discussion that Kalinichenko came round to seeing that I was right, and he himself came with me. In the archives we discovered documents disclosing who, among the inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye, had kept tabs on the Semenota brothers and other members of our group, and how much these curs had received for their services.

We discovered, among other things, that Piotr Sharovski, a former member of our group, was an agent of the secret police to which he had rendered numerous services.

I passed all these documents on to our group. Unfortunately nearly all of the individuals named in them had been killed in the war. The only ones who remained were Sopliak and Sharovski and the policemen Onichenko and Bugayev who, when off duty, donned civilian clothing and sneaked around courtyards and gardens to spy on all who struck them as suspect.

We noted the names of those still living, being of the opinion that the time had not yet come to execute them: moreover, three of them, Sopliak, Sharovski and Bugayev were not in Gulyai-Polye—they had vanished shortly after my arrival.

I made public the document proving the guilt of P. Sharovski who had betrayed Aleksandr Semenyuta and Marfa Pivel to the police. The documents relating to the three missing culprits were kept secret. We hoped they might return some day and that we might arrest them without too many problems. As for the fourth, Nazar Onichenko, he had been dispatched to the front by the coalition government, but after a time had managed to leave it and gone to live in Gulyai-Polye, without showing his face at communal meetings or gatherings.

Shortly after publication of the document concerning Piotr Sharovski, Nazar Onichenko accosted me right in the heart of Gulyai-Polye. This was the very policeman and secret agent who, during a search of my home, had ordered my mother to be frisked and had struck her when she protested.

Now this cur, sold body and soul to the police, scurried up to me and, whipping off his cap, called out with outstretched hand: 'Nestor Ivanovich! Hello!'

The voice, the mannerisms, the mimicry of this Judas filled me with unspeakable disgust. I began to quiver with hatred and angrily I barked at him, 'Get back, you wretch, get back or I'll take your life!' He hopped aside and turned as white as snow. Automatically my hand reached into my pocket and I clutched my revolver tightly, wondering if I should kill the cur on the spot or whether I should bide my time.

Reason got the better of anger and the thirst for vengeance.

Utterly spent, I let myself collapse on to a chair in the entrance of a neighbouring shop. The shopkeeper came up to me, greeted me and put some questions to me that I was incapable of understanding.

I apologised for having taken his chair and begged him to leave me be. Ten minutes later, I asked a peasant to assist me back to the Peasants' Union Committee.

Having learned of my brush with Onichenko, the members of our group and the members of the Union Committee demanded the publication of the document which proved that, in addition to being in the police (which the peasants very well knew, for he had arrested and beaten a number of them) he was also an agent of the secret police.

One after another, all of the comrades insisted that this document be made known so that they might then kill the culprit.

I strenuously opposed this and begged them to leave him be for the time being, pointing out that there were more dangerous traitors, especially Sopliak who, according to the evidence in our hands, was a specialist in espionage. He had worked for a long time in Gulyai-Polye and at Pologi among the workers of the Depot and had helped keep tabs on comrade Semenota.

Another, Bugayev, was also an accomplished nark. He came and went among the workers and peasants, bearing sparkling seltz water on a wooden tray, that he would sell to them. He was especially visible at the time when the tsar's government had promised a 2,000 rouble reward to whoever delivered Aleksandr Semenyuta to it. More than once, Bugayev, wearing disguise, had gone missing for weeks at a time along with the police commissar Karachenz and Nazar Onichenko. Abandoning their official posts, they would roam the environs of Gulyai-Polye or the quarters of Aleksandrovsk and Ekatorinoslav. Police commissar Karachenz was killed by the comrade A. Semenyuta at the Gulyai-Polye theatre. Bugayev, Sopliak and Sharovski were still alive and were hiding out somewhere in the area.

That was why Nazar Onichenko was not to be touched just yet. One had to arm oneself with patience and try to lay hands on the others who, from what the peasants said, often appeared in Gulyai-Polye.

While asking the comrades not to give Nazar Onichenko any cause for alarm for the time being, I told them it was important to seize all of these curs and kill them, such individuals being a blight upon any community of men. 'One can expect nothing of them, theirs being the most ghastly of crimes, betrayal. A true revolution has to exterminate every last one of them. A free society of fellowship has no need of traitors. They must all perish by their own hands or be killed by the revolution's vanguard.'

Then and there, all my comrades and friends forswore any immediate unmasking of Nazar Onichenko, postponing his execution until a later date.

## Chapter Four: Fresh elections to the communal Committee. The notion of control.

Even as our group busied itself with complying with certain formalities and sharing out the work among its members—who were many (already we numbered more than 80) but lethargic—and drew up a list of the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist publications to which it was to take out subscriptions, the fresh elections to a Gulyai-Polye communal Committee got underway. Once again I was put forward by the peasants as a candidate, along with a number of my comrades, and we were returned.

Some of the peasants abstained from voting whereas others took part in the elections but, in the majority of cases, only voted for the members of our group or for our supporters.

I had to forego this, despite the pleas of the peasants that I should represent them on the communal Committee, not out of principle but because I was unaware of the stance of the urban anarchists in these elections. I had applied to the Moscow comrades for information on this point through our federation's secretary, but had not as yet received any answer.

In any case, there was a much more important reason for my refusal: my lawful election on to the communal Committee would have conflicted with my plans, my intention being to gear the group's and the peasants' activities towards a reduction of the powers of these committees.

Our group had endorsed my plans and it was with the aim of putting them into effect that I had accepted the chairmanship of the Peasants' Union Committee.

Those plans consisted of achieving, within the framework of a practical understanding of revolutionary endeavour, the most intimate unity possible between the peasant toilers and our group, and to prevent the political parties from gaining a foothold in their ranks. To this end, they had to be made to understand that the parties, however revolutionary they might be at that juncture, would inevitably kill any initiative shown in the revolutionary movement should they come to dominate the will of the people. Furthermore, they had to be shown the need to take the communal Committee—a non revolutionary agency acting under the aegis of the government—under their own control without delay; this so that they might at all times be au fait with the actions of the Provisional Government and lest they find themselves, in the moment of truth, isolated and bereft of specific intelligence regarding the revolutionary movement in the towns.

Lastly, we had to get them to see that they had to rely upon no one in their most pressing task: the conquest of the land and of the right to freedom and autonomy, and that they had to capitalise upon the present moment and upon the difficulty in which the government found itself because of the political parties' contention with one another, in order to make a reality of their revolutionary anarchist aspirations with all that these implied.

Such, in the broad outline, was the schedule of work which I proposed to the Gulyai-Polye group as soon as I returned from Moscow. I talked about it to all of my comrades, pleading with them to adopt it as the basis of our group's activity in peasant areas.

Thus it was in the name of these principles that I determined to jettison different tactical requirements assumed by the anarchists in the years 1906–1907. During that period in fact, the principles of organisation were sacrificed to the principle of exclusiveness: the anarchists huddled in their circles which, removed from the masses, developed abnormally, were lulled into inactivity and thus lost the chance to intervene effectively in the event of popular uprisings and revolutions.

All my suggestions were accepted by our group which, through its organised action, developed them further and had them embraced, if not by all of the peasants of Gulyai-Polye, then at least by an overwhelming majority of them. It is true that this took several months. We shall set out its ongoing and rewarding action through the successive phases of the revolution in fullest detail further on.

## Chapter Five: The teachers' role. Our activity on the communal Committee.

I mentioned earlier that the teachers of Gulyai-Polye primary school had thrown in their lot with us right from my first speech at the skhod of the peasants and workers. But I omitted to mention that what had made up their minds was that they had heard me say it was shameful for intellectual workers to remain inactive in a time of such revolutionary intensity since our reason for finding the struggle so hard was on account of the meagre part they were playing in the activity.

From then on they set energetically to work. They participated in the elections for the communal Committee, were nominated as candidates and in the end were elected. Six out of fourteen of them were returned by the peasants.

The latter, having gone over the services rendered by the brain workers to the toilers of the town and countryside with the members of our own anarchist-communist group, realised that the role of the primary teachers in the history of the revolutionary movement comprised of three distinct stages.

In 1900 the teachers had set enthusiastically to work, educating the illiterate and poverty-stricken. But the backlash of late 1905 put paid to that fine spurt of solidarity for some 5 or 6 years. Their work in the villages was in ruins. And it was only shortly before the world war that they lifted their heads again to resume their work in the unenlightened villages with a renewed faith and hearts brimming with hope.

But the world war, a bloody assault upon civilisation, forced them to abandon this course. Patriotism had captivated most of them more than it ought to have done and educational endeavour was sacrificed to the war effort.

It is true that only 3 or 4 of the teachers of Gulyai-Polye passed through these three phases: the rest were too young and had not had time to taste these inevitable vagaries of fortune. Now at this point they all hoped to work in concert with the peasants and workers. Certain among them... A. Korpussenko, T. Belo'us, Lebedev, T. Kuzmenko and M:A... though as yet without any experience of revolution, were nonetheless keen to make themselves useful anywhere that that vanguard of the Revolution, the peasants and workers, might find their assistance of use. The fact that the primary teachers had not, in the early months of the revolution, sought to lead them enabled them to get close to these obscure heroes of the liberation and to work with them. To begin with the peasants regarded them with certain misgivings; but when the pace of events hotted up, all were won over with enthusiasm and came together for the triumph of the Revolution. Then the peasants and workers welcomed them into their ranks.

It even came to pass that the peasants elected them on to their communal Committees. By this time, the Peasants' Union had established control over the Gulyai-Polye Committee. This control was exercised by members of the Union on permanent secondment to the communal Committee. I recall that when five of my comrades and myself went there we were afraid lest our

appearance might cause a scandal and that, as monitors delegated by the Peasants' Union, we might have the door slammed in our faces. Nothing of the sort. The more two-faced politicians among the Committee's membership, such as the merchants' representatives, the representatives of the shopkeepers and those of the Jewish community who knew very well why they had joined the communal Committee, welcomed us with open arms, declaring that, from day one of the revolution, they had thought of nothing else but working in concert with the peasants on social issues: but, they claimed, not until then had they found the practical means of showing this to the peasants and making themselves understood by them.

'And now, fortunately, the peasants themselves are pointing the way ahead,' ejaculated one of these duplicitous types: and they acclaimed the peasants in the shape of ourselves!

So, six members of the Union joined the communal Committee. We had to keep a firm hold on this position, so important for the peasants' work, and not let it be influenced by ideas inimical to the peasants' revolutionary objectives. The members of the union immersed there in an assembly which, without orders from the centre or from one of its SR, SD or Cadet agents would not make a move, had to remain unshakeable in their convictions and maintain a steadfast attitude in the face of the problems which the toilers' active role in the Revolution confronted them with. Only the political character of the Revolution was discernible at that point. Nonetheless, month by month the actions of the toilers stamped a new character upon the Revolution and it was to be hoped that it would not be long before it would divest itself of the political accoutrements of its initial stages.

This point especially captivated the attention of the Peasants' Union, judging by the reports from the anarchist-communist group, and this is why, in sending its six members to the Committee, the union issued the following instructions to them:

'The Gulyai-Polye Peasants' Union, in delegating six of its members to sit in permanently on the meetings of the communal Committee and to monitor its policy, takes the line that it would be important for Union members to be able to place themselves at the head of the communal Committee's Farming Section.' (Minutes of the Peasants' Union, April 1917).

This was an issue of very acute concern to the peasants: for the farming sections of the communal Committees, in accordance with directives issued from the centre, were bringing especial pressures to bear upon them to get them to continue payment of farm rents to the pomeschiki, pending the decision of the Constituent Assembly on the matter.

The peasants on the other hand were of the belief that, with a revolution underway and one which had half-emancipated them politically, their slavery and the exploitation of their labour by the pomeschiki drones were at an end. This is why, though poorly organised and ill-equipped for any thorough assimilation of the problems of retrieving the land from the pomeschiki, the monasteries and the State as yet and for the problems of restoring such lands to the community, they badgered the Union's representatives to ensure that they were awarded posts on the Committee's farming section. They demanded as a matter of urgency that the business of the farming section be placed before the members of the anarchist-communist group. But we group members dissuaded them from pressing these wishes for the time being, lest it provoke armed conflict with the Aleksandrovsk authorities. At the same time we determined to conduct intensive propaganda in Gulyai-Polye and in the region, so as to prompt the peasants to demand of the communal Committee that the farming section be abolished and to win the right to organise autonomous farming committees.

They took to this notion with alacrity. However, an order arrived from the centre, declaring that the farming sections were part and parcel of the communal Committees and that their abolition was expressly forbidden, but that, henceforth, they might be referred to under the denomination of Farming Departments<sup>1</sup>. Adhering within the communal Committee to the directives from the Peasants' Union, we managed to ensure that the direction of the Farming Department was vested in me. Simultaneously, with the backing of the Union's peasants and of the communal Committee itself, and by agreement with the anarchist-communist group, I became for a time the acting director of this Committee.

It was solely under my influence that our group embarked upon this perilous course. I made my decision after having observed, through the reading of anarchist newspapers and magazines over the first two months of the Revolution, that there was in them no concern with the creation of a mighty formation capable, once the masses were won over, of displaying its organisational talents in the pursuance and defence of the incipient Revolution. I saw the movement I cherished divided as in the past, and I set myself the task of uniting the various groups again in a common action under the prompting of the anarchist-communist group of our enslaved village, most especially because at that point I could already detect a certain disregard for the countryside in the propagandists of the towns.

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<sup>1</sup> We shall see further on that these Farming Departments were redesignated two months later as Farming committees by the very same authorities.

## Chapter Six: The First of May. The agrarian issue as viewed by the peasants

May 1 1917. It was ten years since I had been in a position to take part in this feast of labour: that is why, when it came to the organising of it, I invested a quite special gusto into propaganda among the peasants, the workers and the soldiers from the machine-gunners' detachment.

I collated the documents concerning all that had been done by the urban workers in the dying days of April and made these available to my comrades so that they might have source materials for their addresses to the peasants, workers and soldiers.

The commandant of the 8th Serbian regiment dispatched a delegation to inform us of his wish that his regiment might participate in this workers' celebration alongside the toilers of Gulyai-Polye.

It goes without saying that we did not stand in the way of these wishes. We even permitted the regiment to present itself in battle-dress, for we were counting upon our people—enough, we thought, to disarm it, should the need arise.

The demonstration began in the streets of Gulai Polye from 9 am. onwards. The rallying point for the participants was the Market Square, now the Square of the Martyrs of the Revolution.

A short time afterwards, the anarchists brought news of the revolt of the Petrograd proletariat which on 18–12 April had demanded the resignation of ten capitalist ministers from the government and the transfer of all power to the Soviets of Peasant, Workers and Soldier Deputies, and which had been crushed by the force of arms. This news transformed the character of the demonstration which became hostile to the 'Provisional government' and to its socialist members.

Hastily the commandant of the 8th Serbian Regiment ordered his men back to barracks. A portion of the machine-gunners' detachment declared for the anarchists and lined up with the demonstrators. So numerous were the latter that when a vote was taken on the resolution 'Down with the government, down with all parties ready to inflict this humiliation upon us' and they took to the streets chanting 'The Anarchists' Marching Song', the procession of their closed ranks, 6 to 8 deep, lasted for over 5 hours. So widespread was the hostility towards the government and its agents that the politicians of the communal Committee and the officers from the machine-gunners' detachment—with the exception, though, of two officers especially beloved by the soldiers, the anarchist Pevchenko and the artist Bogdanovich—sought refuge with the staff and the militia which had made not a single arrest since its creation, vanished from Gulyai-Polye.

Addressing the bulk of the demonstrators, the anarchists set out the story of the 'Anarchist Martyrs of Chicago'; the demonstrators honoured their memory by kneeling, then asked the anarchists to lead them without further delay into the fray against the government, all of its servants and the entire bourgeoisie.

The day, however, was not marked by violence. The municipal authorities of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav had by then had their attention drawn to Gulyai-Polye, and sought nothing better than to provoke us into battle before we were ready.

The entire month of May was devoted to intense work at the congresses of the peasants of Aleksandrovsk and Gulyai-Polye. At the Aleksandrovsk congress, I declared that the peasants of Gulyai-Polye commune were unwilling to entrust the task of revolution to the communal Committees and that they were taking their village's Committee under their control. And I was specific as to the manner in which this had to be done.

The peasants' delegates to that congress acclaimed the delegates from Gulyai-Polye and promised to follow their example. The SRs who were also present, were satisfied: but the SDs and Cadets pointed out that the action of the Gulyai-Polye peasants with regard to the cc was at odds with the new overall policy of the country; that in a way there linked within it a danger for the revolution, the control over the established local organisations being of a nature to erode the prestige of the local powers-that-be.

One of the peasants cried out: 'That's right! That's precisely what we want! Each of us in his home district, we will do all in our power to undermine the cc's in their governmental ambitions, until such time as we have adapted them to our ideal of justice and induced them to accept our right to freedom and to independence in retrieving lands from the pomeschiki.'

That declaration, emanating from the body of the peasant delegates, was enough to calm the SDs and the Cadets: for they sensed that if they ventured to combat it, the peasant delegates would have walked out of the Congress and there was no way that they wanted to be left behind on their own in the empty hall. At that stage of the revolution, they still cherished hopes of being able to erect dykes against the revolutionary floodwaters of the toilers.

The Aleksandrovsk Congress concluded with an agenda restoring the lands to the peasants without compensation and a local committee was elected. The SRs were delighted by this decision: the SDs and the Cadets made their anger plain.

In making their way homewards, the peasant delegates reached agreement upon organising themselves without the assistance of these political 'barkers' and an undertaking was arranged between the villages to embark upon an armed struggle against the pomeschiki. 'Failing which,' they said, 'the Revolution will be eclipsed and we will be left once more landless.'

When Shramko and I returned from the Congress and had spelled out its results to the Peasants' Union, the latter expressed many regrets about their having sent us, saying: 'It would have been better to have had no part of that Congress, but to have held one here in Gulyai-Polye instead, summoning to it the delegates from the communes of the Aleksandrovsk district. We are convinced that we would have achieved satisfaction in the matter of the land and its being community property more speedily. But it is too late. Let us hope that the Peasants' Union Committee will make our views upon this matter known not only to the peasants of the Aleksandrovsk district but also to those from the adjoining districts of Pavlograd, Mariupol, Berdyansk and Melitopol so that they may know that we do not make do with motions: what we need is action.'

This declaration led to a vote upon a resolution by the Peasants' Union, in which it was stated: 'The peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region deemed it their most absolute right to proclaim the lands of the pomeschiki, the monasteries and the government to be community property and resolved to pass into action in the near future.' An invitation was extended to all to prepare for this act of justice and to carry it into effect.

The reverberations of this carried well beyond the limits of the Ekaterinoslav department. Delegations from other departments began to arrive in Gulyai-Polye. That went on for several weeks. As chairman of the Peasants' Union I got no rest from them. Some comrades belonging

to other groups stood in for me on current business, whilst I busied myself with the delegates, offering advice to some, instructions to others, explaining how they should go about forming Peasants' Unions, preparing to seize back lands and organising, as the peasants should see fit, agrarian communes or the sharing-out of these lands among the needy. Nearly every one of them told me: 'It would be as well if you here in Gulyai-Polye were to be the first to make a start.'

I asked them why. The answer was always the same: 'We have no organisers. We read but little for hardly anything reaches us. We have yet to be visited by propagandists and we would not ever have read even the proclamations of your 'Union' and of the anarchist-communist group, had our sons not sent us them from the Uzovo mines.'

It pained me to hear this complaint from the enslaved villages and I was infuriated at the thought of those comrades who had stayed in the towns, forgetful of the countryside. Yet in Russia and in the Ukraine, the future of the Revolution, whose impetus the Provisional Government had already begun to curb by capturing it and substituting written programmes, utterly vacuous and unusable, for its creative expansion among workers endowed with political awareness, was largely dependent upon the country districts.

And the more that that thought tormented me, the more fervour I put into pressing ahead, reaching, along with other comrades from the group, into the farthest-flung corners, momentarily abandoning all endeavour in Gulyai-Polye, in order to instruct the peasants in the truth of their situation and in the situation of the Revolution which, unless they injected fresh energy into it, ran a serious risk of going under. Thus I spent several days far from Gulyai-Polye.

I was heartened by the hope of seeing P.A. Kropotkin<sup>1</sup> return to Russia: he would have been able to focus the attention of all the comrades upon the enslaved villages. And then, who knows? Uncle Vanya (Rogdaev) might have come back, he who had been so active in the Ukraine in tsarist days: lastly, if Roshchin and others, less well-known but enterprising also were to come back our work might at last blossom in all its dimensions.

The mass of toilers would receive the answers to the questions which preoccupied them. The anarchist voice would reverberate through the enslaved villages which would all rally around its banner in the struggle against the power of the pomeschiki and of the factory bosses, and for a new world of liberty, equality and solidarity among men.

I believed in that idea to the point of fanaticism and, in its name I grew more and more absorbed by the life of the masses, fervently seeking to galvanise the anarchist-communist group of Gulyai-Polye into doing likewise.

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<sup>1</sup> Piotr Aleksandrovich Kropotkin (1842–1921) (Translator's note)

## Chapter Seven: The Workers' Strike

In the early days of the month of June, anarchists in Aleksandrovsk invited me to a conference, the aim of which was to gather all of the anarchists of Aleksandrovsk together into one Federation. I travelled there on the appointed day. They were all workers by hand or brain. They were divided into anarchist-communists and individualist anarchists: but this division was purely formal, in point of fact they were all revolutionary anarchist-communists and, as such, were dear to me as dearly loved brethren, and I helped them as best I could to come together in a Federation. That Federation established, they promptly set about organising the workers and, for a time, wielded great influence over them.

Upon my return, the workers of the Gulyai-Polye Metalworkers' and Woodworkers' Trades Union asked me to help them set up a Union and to enrol in it myself. When that was done, they begged me to assume the leadership of the strike which they were anticipating.

Thus I was thoroughly occupied, on the one hand by the peasants, on the other by the workers—both groups demanding my assistance. Among the workers some, however, were more au fait than I with industrial matters, which was a source of great pleasure to me. I agreed to lead the strike, hoping, during this time, to recruit these like-minded comrades into our group. One of them, V. Antonov, was an SR., but the others belonged to no party; among the latter the two most energetic were Sereguin and Mironov.

Before the strike was declared, the workers of the two foundries, of the mills and of the Kystari-owned<sup>1</sup> workshops organised a meeting and asked me to devise, draft and present a list of their demands to the employers, through the agency of the Soviet of the trades union. In the course of that meeting and of the compilation of the demands, I was able to appreciate that comrades Antonov, Sereguin and Mironov had been at work in the factory Committees in an anarchist capacity for a long time already. The first of them, that is Antonov, was chairman of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. And if these comrades had not entered our group it was solely because they were overburdened with work in the factories. I objected: since my homecoming from prison, indeed, I had asked that the group be kept at all times au fait with the work of all its members. So I persistently urged these comrades to enter our group and henceforth to work inside their factory committees and, in a general way, among the workers in accordance with its directives. They gave in to my arguments and came over to us.

Together, we summoned all of the employers and submitted the workers' demands to them: wage increases of 80% to 100%.

Such a demand provoked genuine wrath in them, and they categorically refused to grant increases of that size. We gave them a day to think it over. During that day, the workers carried on with their work in the workshops and factories. The next day, the employers approached the trade union Soviet with counterproposals involving 35%-40% rises.

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<sup>1</sup> Small industrialists working from their homes. (Translator's note).

We regarded the offer as a direct affront to the workers, and following lengthy discussions and mutual insult, we invited them to think it over for a further day.

The employers and some of their representatives who knew the statutes of the trade union by heart and were socialists in their heart of hearts, but who had the factory managers behind them, let us down after having given us assurances that, the following day, they would not be coming back with higher percentages than they had offered on this occasion.

We promptly summoned the members of the factory Committees and workshop representatives together to devise a way of bringing work to a halt everywhere simultaneously, at the precise moment when, having come the next day to the trades union Soviet without any new offers, the employers would be making their way homewards again. It was determined that the Soviet would have to post a trustworthy man in the central telephone exchange so as to connect all telephones with mine in order that the employers, returning from the Soviet to the factory and the workshops, might be received by their workers, all of whom would have ceased working.

I suggested a plan for the seizure of all the capital to be found in the various undertakings and in the Gulyai-Polye bank To the members of the Soviet and of the factory Committees. I was sure that we would not be able to maintain our hold on these undertakings and that the communal Committees and government commissars would dispatch regiments which, to avoid being moved up to the German front, would strive to have the government look kindly upon them by shooting the cream of the worker militants, beginning with me.

But as I saw it, it was important to start to put the idea of expropriating capitalist institutions into effect right away, before the Provisional Government had time to curb the workers completely and steer them down the counter-revolutionary road.

However the bulk of the members of the trades union and the factory committees promptly asked me not to put this scheme to the workers. They argued that we were as yet badly prepared for this action and would consequently have the worst of it, thereby achieving nothing but hampering its subsequent realisation at a point when the workers would at last have been equipped for it by us.

Following protracted discussions the members of the group came to the same conclusions, saying that by implementing my suggestions right away, when the peasants for their part could offer the workers no practical support in the expropriation of the pomeschiki's lands, we would risk making an irreparable mistake. These arguments shook me, and I dropped my insistence but clung steadfastly to the notion of taking my suggestion as a ground-plan for the factory committees to train the workers for effecting the expropriation at some time in the future, assuring them that the peasants were also mulling over this question. I told them that we had to devote all of our efforts to coordinating the tendencies of the peasants and those of the workers.

This time my suggestion was accepted and I was elected chairman of the trades union and of the sickness benefit fund. Antonov was especially chosen to be my assistant and to act as my deputy should I be snowed under by the demands of work in the other organisations.

Likewise, the peasants seconded a comrade to me who could stand in for me. But it was agreed on all sides that the initiatives should always come from me and that I should always hold the reins of these various institutions.

The employers from the factories, mills and workshops came back to the Soviet of the trades union with the same opinions and wishes as the day before. After two hours of discussion they stretched their generosity so far as to award wage rises of 45% – 60%.

Whereupon, as the one chairing the meeting, I declared that all the negotiations between us had broken down. 'The Soviet of the trades union has invested me with full powers to assume the direction of all the public undertakings run by you, citizens, but not belonging to you by right: we will give you your explanation in the street, outside each one of those undertakings. I declare this meeting closed!'

I gathered together all of my papers and moved towards the telephone. At which point the boss of the most important factory in Gulyai-Polye, one Mikhail Borisovich Kerner, got to his feet and exclaimed: 'Nestor Ivanovich, you were over hasty in winding up the meeting. In my view the workers' demands are wholly justified. They have a right to have us meet them and, for my own part, I am going to sign right away.'

The other employers and above all their representatives shouted indignantly: 'Mikhail Borisovich, what are you playing at?'

'No, no, gentlemen. You... you may do as you wish, but I, I undertake to meet the demands of my workers,' replied M.B. Kerner.

I called for order and asked: 'Citizens, you have always been on the side of order and legality. Is it legal to reopen the meeting on the issue that prompted its being wound up?' 'Of course! Sure,' replied the employers and their representatives.

'Then I declare the meeting open and I invite you all to endorse a wage rise of 80% — 100%. And I handed them the texts, all ready and waiting. Then, spent from fatigue and nervous tension, I asked comrade Mironov to take over from me for a moment, and off I went to snatch some rest in another room.

Half an hour later I returned to find the employers in the act of endorsing the texts proposed by me.

When it was all over and they had left the room, I reported our victory to the comrade workers of all the firms over the telephone, announcing that the employers had signed and recommending that they remain at work until evening, promising that members of the trades union Soviet would come that very evening to give them a detailed report on this shared success.

From then, the workers of Gulyai-Polye and its environs took all of the enterprises in which they worked under their control, examining the economic and administrative aspect of the matter and preparing to assume their effective management.

From that day forth, Gulyai-Polye particularly attracted the attention of the Ekaterinaslav Communal Committee, of the Ukraine's chauvinistic Selyanskaya<sup>2</sup> Spilka, of the Soviet of Worker, Peasant and Soldier Deputies, and of the local industrial Committee, not to mention that of the Aleksandrovsk organisations in which the agents of the 'coalition government' were master. Visits to Gulyai-Polye by instructors, organisers and propagandists from these places became more frequent. But they all went away disappointed, thwarted by the action of the anarchist peasants and workers.

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<sup>2</sup> Spilka=Rada—affiliated rural nationalist organisation (PS).

## Chapter Eight: Some Results.

Let us return to the communal Committee and see what we, as delegates of the Peasants' Union, had been able to achieve in the region, under its auspices.

In the first place, after having assumed the functions of the farming Department, we had tried to make the Department of Provisions an independent unit also, and at one point, when I had won over the whole of the communal Committee, some of my comrades on that Committee and I asked that the militia be abolished—something that we were unable to secure as a result of intervention by the central authority. So we took away its right of arrest and to make searches without warrant and thus limited its role to that of the message boy of the communal Committee.

Next I called together all of the pomeschiki and Kulaki and recovered from them all of the deeds concerning the lands acquired by them. The farming Department drew up a detailed inventory of all the properties held by the pomeschiki and Kulaki in their life of idleness on the basis of these documents.

In the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies, we organised a Committee of the batraki<sup>1</sup> and set up a batrak movement in opposition to the pomeschiki and kulaki who were their exploiters.

We established effective control of the batraki over their own holdings, thereby paving the way for them to join forces with the peasants with an eye to concerted action on the day when the minority of proprietors would be expropriated to the benefit of the mass of toilers.

After that, I stopped looking upon the communal Committee as an institution with the aid of which one could, within the framework of the law as it stood, lawfully obtain whatever was of service to the spread of the Revolution among the peasants of the enslaved villages.

Having put my head together with some comrades, I put it to the whole group that it be established as a principle that all its members had an obligation to conduct propaganda among the peasants and workers so as to persuade them to seek by every means to transform the make-up of their communal Committees which adhered less to the wishes and rights of the peasants and workers than to some order from a government commissar. 'Indeed,' I said, 'these Committees, being territorial units accountable to government, are incapable of being revolutionary units rallying around them the flower of the Revolution. As the latter develops, they must disappear: the proletarian masses will dissolve them. The social revolution demands it.'

'Since our eyes are fixed upon it, we must, beginning now, act in the name of its principles and help the peasants and workers to work to this end. The communal Committees cannot, nor should they, ignore the wishes of their electors. Like the orders of the government, all their decisions should be submitted to all of the citizenry at the skhods for approval or rejection.'

'We are standing now,' I then said to the group, 'at the end of June, which is to say at the end of a third year of Revolution. That is all the time that we, anarchist peasants and workers, have been working lawfully among the oppressed toilers. It strikes me that in that short span we have already met with some success. Now it is a question of drawing lessons from this, and

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<sup>1</sup> Batraki farm-hand.

returning to action and clearly indicating our movement's objective. That we must do outside the communal Committee.

At present we are in touch with a whole series of regions where we are bringing our influence to bear: in the Kamyshevat region particularly our comrades have the upper hand completely. That region has already responded to our request for support in our struggle against the Aleksandrovsk local Committee. Its representative, comrade Dudnik, has joined us for the third time to coordinate the activity of the peasants of his region with that of the peasants of Gulyai-Polye.

Day by day, the working people of other regions are lending an ear with growing attention and interest to the voice of Gulyai-Polye and are organising according to its principles, despite opposition from the SRs, the SDs and the Cadets. (At that point, there were as yet no Bolsheviks in the villages).

Thorough examination of the revolution over the past four months shows us it is time to direct our activity along a definite line and to bring it into direct confrontation with that of the politicians—the Right, already in power, and the Left, striving after it. Because the Right Social Revolutionaries and the bourgeoisie are seizing control of the Revolution and are bringing it to an impasse. But then again, right from the early days it was obvious to us who laboured in the enslaved villages, that the Ukrainian village had not yet had time to fully free itself of the burden of slavery and grasp the real meaning of the Revolution. Scarcely had it begun to feel the heavy yoke of ages shaken and already it is on the lookout for roads to its complete economic and political emancipation, and along the way is summoning anarchy to its aid. It would be easy not to see the needs of the enslaved village and not make haste to come to their aid: it would be enough to espouse the viewpoint of the majority of our urban comrades and join with them in saying that the village yearns for a return to the bourgeois, capitalist regime, etc. But I firmly believe that we will not go that far. We have seen our village at work and affirm that there were, and are, revolutionary elements in the peasants' ranks: we need merely aid them to shrug off the statist yoke which has been treacherously placed upon them by the politicians.

Effective assistance can only be given by the revolutionary anarchists. Our movement in the towns—in which our elders place exaggerated hopes—is apparently much too weak to cope with a problem of such tremendous dimensions, and possibly carrying just as serious consequences in its wake. I am certain there are persons capable of great things amongst us. But those capable of taking the responsibility for these great things upon themselves are very few in number. They can be counted. We would do well not to forget this important point. Lots of comrades have already fled, and are still fleeing from responsible work or work demanding a sustained effort. This is the phenomenon which lies behind and maintains the disorganisation in our ranks. Oh! What a threat that disorganisation poses for us! Nothing can stand comparison with it. Indeed, because of it, our best endeavours are frustrated, even now when the Revolution is in progress often being wholly wasted and bringing our movement no benefit at all. This phenomenon has always blighted us anarchists, but today we are more beset by it than ever: it prevents us from having a powerful organisation, vital if we are to play an effective role. Only such an organisation will enable us to respond to the Revolution's cry of suffering. Now, the appeal being sent out today by the enslaved village is an exact translation of that cry of suffering; and were we anarchists organised, we would have heard it and responded to it in time.

It is tiresome and painful to broach this topic, but it is vitally necessary. Those among us, comrades, who have not forgotten the essential aim of the Revolution and are not mesmerised by nebulous and pointless theories, but are honestly striving for the most effective means of

upholding our revolutionary ideal and of injecting it into the masses here and now, will not cease from protesting against this disorganisation, for we understand the immense danger of it. But it is not enough to protest. One must act and untiringly, without, however, neglecting to uphold our ideal at all times and above all, without preventing its spreading to others. Such an approach will abet the anarchist ideal and make it possible to create an organisation that will set our movement on the right lines.'

## Chapter Nine: The Campaign against Tenant Farming.

It was the month of July. The peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region refused to hand over the second instalment of their farm rents to the pomeschiki and the kulaki, intending, once the harvest had been gathered in, to seize back the land from these landlords without exchanging words either with them or the authorities who looked after them, and to share it out afterwards among all who wished to cultivate it, peasant or worker.

Several communes followed Gulyai-Polye's example.

The Alexsandrovsk authorities and their socialist constitutionalist and democrat agents were quite indignant at this. With the technical and financial assistance of the communal Committees and the government commissary the revolutionary communes were inundated by agitator propagandists urging the peasants not to undermine the prestige of the Provisional Government which, they claimed, was deeply concerned with their lot and intended, in the very near future, to summon a Constituent Assembly. Pending the summoning of this 'competent' Assembly and its findings with regard to agrarian reform, no one had any legal right to trespass against the property rights of the pomeschiki and other landowners. And on orders from above, the farming Departments were hastily rechristened farming Committees and broke away from the communal Committees to form independent units. They were awarded the right to collect from the peasants all rents due on the lands leased by them from the pomeschiki and kulaki. The monies collected were to be passed on to the district farm Committee which in turn was to pass them on to the landed proprietors.

The agitator-propagandists of the various parties cynically assured the peasants that the pomeschiki and the kulaks still had enormous taxes to pay: 'Our revolutionary government,' they said, 'insists upon payment, and the poor pomeschiki can only raise the money from the peasant to whom they lease their lands.'

The struggle between the anarchist communist group and Peasants' Union on the one side and the agitators/agents, backed by government officials and the agrarian, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie on the other, became one in which no quarter was given.

At the skhods-rallies summoned by order of the government's commissary, the peasants flung the Provisional Government-inspired propagandists off the rostrums and manhandled them for their odious speechifying hypocritically peppered with revolutionary phrases designed solely to distract the peasants from their true goal: the reconquest of the land, their age-old entitlement.

Here and there peasants who had been misled scraped together their last kopecks to pay their rents to the ravenous landlords who enjoyed the backing of the Church, the State and its hireling government. But even those who had been tricked never lost hope of overwhelming their enemies. They lent an even more attentive ear to the appeal of the group of anarchist-communist peasants and from their Union which exhorted them: 'not to yield and to make strenuous efforts to prepare themselves for a more bitter struggle.'

This is what I told several thousand working people assembled in a skhod-rally around this time in Gulyai Polye, drawing my inspiration from the guideline underlying an appeal issued by the anarchist-communist group and the Peasants' Union, the organisations on whose behalf I was speaking.

'Toilers! Peasants, factory workers and you, brain-worker who holds aloof from us! Have you witnessed how, in the space of four months, the bourgeoisie have proved capable of organising themselves and of luring the socialists, who have become their loyal servants, to their sides?

If the propaganda campaign waged in favour of payment of the rents to the pomeschiki, even now in these days of the revolution, does not strike you as proof enough, let me quote some other facts to you, comrades, that will convince you further: on July 3, the Petrograd proletariat rose against the Provisional Government which, in the name of the bourgeoisie's rights, sought to smother the Revolution. To that end, the government had abolished several farm Committees in the Ural region—their actions having been hostile to the bourgeoisie—and tossed their members into prison. With the same purpose in mind, agents of that same government, socialist, pressed the peasants to pay their rents to the pomeschiki before our very eyes. From July 3 to 5, the blood of our worker brothers ran in the streets of Petrograd. The socialists were actively involved in this massacre of our brothers.

Indeed, the socialist Kerenski, minister of War, called up several tens of thousands of Cossacks, those age-old butchers of the toilers, to put down that rising.

Thus, those socialists who are partners in the government lost their heads in the service of the bourgeoisie and, in concert with the Cossacks, slew the finest defenders of our working brothers. In so doing, they incited the latter to deal likewise with them and with the bourgeoisie who induced them to perpetrate this hateful, inexcusable crime.

Where, then, does this crime committed by the enemies of our emancipation and of the peaceful happy life to which we aspire lead us? To mutual extermination and nothing else.

That, comrades, can only harm us all and will, above all, be damaging to the so long awaited and finally arrived Revolution, which however has achieved nothing as yet. The masses have not yet completely awakened from the sloth stamped into them by ages of slavery. Only falteringly are they coming around to the Revolution, which they accept as a fait accompli; and it is only with extreme caution that they are demanding their right to freedom and a life independent of the new executioners. But those rights, comrades, lurk, it seems, in the gun barrels and machine-guns of the stronger. Let us be strong then, brother workers, so strong that the enemies of our real liberation sense that strength in us. Onwards, then, striding confidently toward organisation and revolutionary autonomy. The future, a very near future, belongs to us. Let us all be ready for it!

After me, a Ukrainian SR took the floor; he urged the working people of Gulyai-Polye to remember that in order to, '... counterbalance the execrable Provisional Government of Petrograd, 'our' Ukrainian government had been organised in Kiev, in the shape of a Central Rada, a truly revolutionary government, the only lawful one and the only one capable of restoring to our land its freedom and happiness for the Ukrainian people.' In conclusion, he exclaimed, 'Down with the Katzapi<sup>1</sup>, death to those brigands! Long live none but our government, the Central Rada and its Secretariat in our land!'

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<sup>1</sup> Katzapi. A derogatory term used by the Ukrainians to refer to the Great Russians. (In the text the entire phrase is in Ukrainian — translator's note.)

But the toilers of Gulyai-Polye remained deaf to the exhortation of the Ukrainian Social Revolutionary. Not only that, but they all shouted in chorus: 'Off the platform! We want nothing to do with your government,' and they passed the following resolution later on:

'We salute the courage of the workers felled on July 3-5 in the struggle against the Provisional Government. We, the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Polye, have not forgotten the atrocities of that government. Death and damnation to the Provisional Government, and to the Kiev government, the Central Rada and its Secretariat, those direst foes of mankind's liberty.'

After this speech-making and the motion passed by the peasants and workers, the Russian and Ukrainian chauvinists and the statist socialists cursed me, and with me, the whole anarchist-communist group: for it was impossible thereafter to sing the praises of the various governments in Gulyai-Polye. Indeed, they were regarded by the toilers as hirelings and were constantly interrupted whenever they broached the subject.

So the days passed, one after the other, until whole weeks and months had slipped by: nonetheless, from village to village, my comrades and I pressed on with our propaganda.

Along came the second district Congress of the Peasants' Union, and our Union did not fail to send its two delegates to it, comrade Krat and myself. The Congress was dreary. Mere repetition of what had already been said time and time again. The Russian and Ukrainian SRs there, represented by S.S. Popov and by the teacher Radomski respectively, noisily concluded, in the view of the peasant delegates, an alliance aimed at conquering land and freedom, which is to say that after each of them had read his programme, they positioned themselves in front of the Bureau and shook hands.

The peasant delegates from the communes of Gulyai Polye, Kamyshevat, Rozhdestvensk and Konsko-Rasdorskoye announced to them, 'It's all very well your making ready to fight together for land and freedom, but where and against whom are you going to fight?'

'Everywhere and against any who refuse, without compensation, to surrender the land to the peasants,' was the retort from the SRs. 'But we will round off our struggle in the Constituent Assembly,' stated the SR Popov. 'And in the Pan-Ukrainian sejm,' added the school teacher Radomski.

Whereupon a slight difference erupted between the two SR allies. They swapped views in a half-whisper, while, on the peasant delegate's bench, some delegates chuckled while others were outraged.

In conclusion, the Congress elected from among its members, the delegates to the Departments Congress of the Peasants' Union and of the Soviet of Worker, Peasant and Soldier Deputies. We representatives of Gulyai-Polye took no part in those elections, thereby objecting to this form of nomination; according to us, it should have been up to the peasants directly to select the delegates to the Departmental Congress.

This abstention led to our being dubbed wreckers and to accusations of defying the election laws and, as such, to our being violently taken to task by the Congress leaders, the SRs, the SDs and Cadets who stated that we were the only delegates who did not want what the peasants wanted. Laughter erupted from the peasant representatives' bench, laughter that turned into whistling at the Congress leaders. Once again we delegates from the Gulyai-Polye Peasants' Union objected at the manner of election, stressing the need for the Departmental Congress's being made up of directly elected envoys. That, we said, would show the true feeling and revolutionary strength of the peasants of the various departments. But once again we were dismissed as not understanding the peasants' interests. The Congress leaders suggested that we put our

views to the Departmental Congress. But as we had refused to select our delegates from among those members present our candidacy did not go forward and we thus found ourselves out in the cold.

However, we had many reasons to believe that the organising Bureau of the aforementioned Congress would issue direct invitations to Gulyai-Polye's delegates: for words to this effect had been exchanged between the Peasants' Union of our village and the Peasants' Union Departmental Committee.

The initiative, however, did not come from Gulyai-Polye but from Ekaterinoslav, which, in any case, was only indirectly empowered, so in spite of everything we could not be sure of taking part in the Departmental Congress and made our way home to Gulyai-Polye under the dismal impression of having come off worst this time around.

Nonetheless, our line of conduct at the Congress having been, in our estimation, correct, we were not worried about the revolutionary future of our Peasants' Union. Upon returning, we submitted a report to it, as we also did to the Union of the metalworkers and woodworkers who had taken on an interest in the peasants' congress and had asked to be kept informed of our work: similarly, we reported back to the general communal assembly of the workers and peasants of Gulyai-Polye and district. At the same time we prepared the working people for the sending of delegates to the Departmental Congress, in the absence of an invitation from the latter, so as to record an objection to the attitude of the recently concluded district Congress leaders. By the same token, we wanted to make known to the delegates to the Departmental Congress how the Right SRs, the SDs and the Cadets were seeking to stifle any revolutionary or autonomous action by the peasants, and how their agitator-propagandists, abetted by the government's commissars, were visiting the towns and villages and organising meetings and tricking peasants in order to extract rents from them and for the benefit of the pomeschiki. They thereby reduced the former to even direr straits as, not having participated—as the pomeschiki and kulaki had—in looting and brigandage, they had not been able to amass the sums needed to pay for the hire of the lands that those robbers had appropriated to themselves.

While we were making ready for the Departmental Congress and offering help in the form of advice to the peasants of some communes and districts belonging to other departments, the Peasants' Union Committee received an invitation from the Departmental Soviet of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies to delegate two representatives to the Departmental Congress of Soviets and the Union of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies on 5 August.

It was decided that an assembly of the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Polye be held. Meanwhile, the Union Committee drew up a report for presentation to the Departmental Congress.

## Chapter Ten: P.A. Kropotkin's Arrival in Russia – Encounter with the Anarchists of Ekaterinoslav.

It was at this point that we received news of P.A. Kropotkin's arrival in Petrograd. The newspapers had already mentioned it, but we anarchist peasants had placed no trust in that, having received no precise signals that would have enabled us to begin to rally our meagre forces and to assume their combat stations in the Revolution in an organised way.

But now the newspapers and letters arriving from Petrograd were telling us that P.A. Kropotkin, who had suffered a serious illness during his trip from London to Petrograd, had at last arrived at the very heart of the Revolution, in Petrograd. They told of the welcome that had been accorded him by the socialists then in power, Kerensky foremost among them. An indescribable joy seized our group. A general meeting was organised, wholly devoted to debating the question: 'What will our venerable elder Piotr Aleksevich say to us?'

All of us were of the same mind: P.A. would point out the practical means of organising our movement in the countryside. With his sensitivity and his alert understanding, he could not but grasp the overwhelming necessity of the villages' having the support of our revolutionary strength. As a true apostle of anarchism, he would not let slip this unique moment in Russia's history and, availing of his moral sway over our people would waste no time in spelling out the guidelines to which anarchists had to adhere in this Revolution in detail.

I composed a letter of welcome on behalf of our Gulyai-Polye group and sent it to P.A. Kropotkin through the good offices of, I believe, the editors of the newspaper *Burevestnik*. (The Storm Petrel)

In that letter, we greeted P.A. Kropotkin and congratulated him upon his happy homecoming to the country, expressing the certain belief that the country, in the person of its finest representatives, was impatiently awaiting he who had waged a lifelong struggle for the highest ideas of justice, ideas which could not but influence the pursuance and realisation of the Russian Revolution.

We signed it: the Ukrainian anarchist-communist group of Gulyai-Polye village, Ekaterinoslav department.

We expected no reply to our modest letter of welcome, but we awaited with immeasurable impatience and great anxiety, the answer to our questions, knowing that, without one, we would squander our efforts to perhaps absolutely no avail: for it was possible that the other groups were not searching for what we sought, or indeed that they were searching in quite a different direction. It seemed to us that the enslaved countryside posed this direct question: 'Which is the way and what are the means to seize hold of land and, without bowing to any authority, to drive off the parasitical drones who live in comfort and luxury at our expense?'

The answer had been provided by P.A. in his book *The Conquest of Bread*. But the toilers had not read that book, only a handful of circles were familiar with it and now the masses no longer had time to read. It needed a forceful voice to spell out to them clearly in accessible terms, the essential point of the *Conquest of Bread*, lest they lapse into contemplative inertia, and to point the way ahead without delay. But from whom would this vivid, straight and strong talk come? It could only come from an anarchist propagandist, an organiser.

'But,' I said, hand on heart, 'have there ever been anarchist propaganda schools in Russia or in the Ukraine? Not that I have ever been aware of. And if there were any, where, I ask you, where are the vanguard fighters they have turned out?'

Twice over I have travelled through regions belonging to different districts, different departments, and not once did I come across a peasant who, in answer to my question 'Have you had anarchist orators around here?' replied 'Yes, we have had some.' Everywhere I was told in reply, 'We have never had any. We are very happy and very grateful to see that you have not forgotten us.' Where then are the leaven of our movement? In my view, they vegetate in the towns or, all too often, do quite the opposite of what they should be doing.'

If the advanced years of P.A. prevented him from taking an active part in the Revolution and from giving fresh impetus to our comrades in the towns, the enslaved countryside would fall once and for all under the rule of the political parties and the Provisional Government. That would spell the end of the Revolution.

This view of mine was shared by those of my comrades who, working in the factories, had not toured the countryside and were ignorant of the real state of mind of the peasants. By contrast, those who were familiar with the countryside were severely critical of me, saying that I lacked confidence in the revolutionary sentiments of the peasants. 'The countryside,' they contended, 'has managed to grasp the intentions of the agent of the sundry socialist and bourgeois parties who came among them on behalf of the Provisional Government so well that, in any event, it will never let itself be led astray.'

To be sure, indications of such a state of mind existed in the countryside, but they were comparatively feeble. The peasants needed to feel supported in these critical times by the revolutionary vigour of the towns if they were to perform useful work, do away with the existing privileged classes and prevent others from appearing in their place.

A fortnight passed thus. No news reached us from Petrograd: we still did not know how P.A. envisaged the role of our movement in the Revolution. Were we on the right lines? Was it right to focus our attentions in the towns, paying little or no heed to the enslaved countryside?

And so we came to the moment when the Departmental Congress of the Soviets of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies, and of the Peasants' Union was due to open.

An assembly of the Peasants' Union was summoned in Gulyai-Polye, at which the matter of participation in the Congress was gone into. The transformation of the Peasants' Union into a Peasants' Soviet held our attention for a long time. It was decided at last that a delegate be sent to the Congress. I was elected to represent the peasants, and comrade Sereguin to represent the workers.

I was particularly happy to be going to Ekaterinoslav where I hoped to contact the anarchist Federation and have personal discussions on all the matters of concern to our group. (What most interested us was, how come the town did not send anarchist propagandists into the villages?)

I deliberately set out a day earlier and made my way straight to the Federation's premises. There I found the secretary, comrade Molchanki, from Odessa, an old comrade whose acquaintance I had made on the chain-gang. This was a delight: we embraced.

Then I jumped down his throat: what were they playing at in the town? Why weren't they sending organisers into the country townships?

Comrade Molchanski, as was his way, gesticulated, got excited and said, 'We haven't the wherewithal, brother. We are weak. We've only just got ourselves organised here and can scarcely manage to meet the needs of the workers in our factories and the soldiers in our garrison. We hope that our strength will grow in time, then we will strengthen our ties with the countryside and get down to forceful propaganda in the villages.'

Whereupon we fell silent for a long time, each of us caught up in his thoughts, pondering the future of our movement in the Revolution. Then comrade Molchanski began to comfort me, assuring me that in the very near future comrades Rogdaev, Roshkin, Arshinov and many others would be arriving in Ekaterinoslav, and that then action would be stepped up and extended to include the villages. Then he accompanied me to the Federation's club, formerly the 'English Club'.

There I found many comrades, some chatting about the Revolution, others reading, and still others setting down to a meal. In short, I found before me the 'anarchist' society which, as a matter of principle, does not countenance any order, any authority and devotes no time to propaganda among the working people of the countryside, who are nonetheless sorely in need of it.

So, I wondered, why have they seized such a luxurious and enormous building from the bourgeoisie? What use can it be to them when, amid this Babel, there is no order, not even in the shouting by which they resolve the Revolution's most serious issues, when their hall is not swept, the chairs knocked over and on the great table, covered with luxurious velvet, crusts of bread, herring-heads and gnawed bones are strewn all around?

My heart tightened with pain at the sight of it. At this point in came comrade I. Tarassyuk, known as Kabas, assistant to the secretary, comrade Molchanski. Aggrieved, he called out with indignation, 'Whoever ate at this table, get it cleaned up,' and he set about righting the toppled chairs.

The table was cleared intermediately and they began to sweep the room.

On leaving the club I returned to the Federation premises, picked out some pamphlets to take back to Gulyai-Polye, and was preparing to make my way to the Congress office to secure a room free of charge for the duration of our business, when in came a young girl. She was a comrade. She had come to seek an escort to the municipal theatre, someone to back her up in her confrontation with the SD 'Nil' who had a fair number of workers in his retinue. The comrades present said they were busy and, without a word, off she went.

Molchanski asked me, 'Don't you know her? She's a pleasant comrade, full of energy.' I immediately stepped outside and caught her up. I suggested I accompany her to the meeting, but she replied, 'You'll be of no use unless you take to the floor.' I promised to speak.

So she took me by the arm and we moved briskly towards the theatre. Along the way, this charming young comrade confided to me that she had become an anarchist only three years previously. It had not come about of itself. For two years she had read the works of Kropotkin and Bakunin; then she had felt her beliefs take shape. Now she was wholly committed to those ideas and engaged in active propaganda. Up until July she had spoken in front of workers, but had

not dared speak against the anarchists' enemies, the SDs. In July she grew bolder and delivered a speech against the SD 'Nil' at a meeting and had been heckled.

'Now,' she said, I've made up my mind to re-enter the fray against this 'Nil', one of the Social Democratic Party's most brilliant agitators.'

Our conversation was left at that.

At the meeting I spoke against the celebrated 'Nil' under the alias of 'Skromny'(l) (my nickname from my penitentiary days). I spoke badly, though my comrades assured me afterward that I had been fine, that I had simply been a little nervous.

As for my bouncy young comrade, she won over the entire hall with her soft tones which had fine oratorical strength. The audience was captivated by that voice, and the absolute silence which reigned while she spoke turned into furious clapping and cries of approval, 'Excellent, very fine, comrade!'

She did not speak long, forty-three minutes in all, but she succeeded so well in whipping up the mass of her listeners against the theses aired by 'Nil' that when the latter came to reply to those who had spoken against him, the entire hall shouted, 'That's not true! Don't fill our heads with nonsense!—The anarchists speak the truth.—You, you are telling us lies.'

As we made our way back from the meeting, several comrades joined us. The young girl who had spoken told me, 'You know, comrade Skromny,<sup>1</sup> this 'Nil' was driving me crazy with his influence over the workers and I had set myself the task of bringing it to an end at any cost. Just one thing held me back: my youth. The workers display more trust in older comrades. I was scared,' she added, 'that that might prevent me from doing my duty by them.'

I could only wish her further successes in her anarchist endeavours and we parted after having promised to meet again the next day to speak about Gulyai-Polye, about which she had heard a lot of good things.

The meeting delayed my arrival at the Congress office and I was unable to obtain a room at the hotel. So I spent the night in comrade Sereguin's home.

I devoted the whole of the next day to the Congress and was unable to make time to meet the young comrade as I had promised. I was caught up the whole of the next day by the business of the farming Commission. There I met the Left SR, Schneider, dispatched to the Departmental Congress by the Central Pan-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies. He too was elected on to the farming Commission.

Unanimously, and in perfect agreement, the Commission voted that the land be socialised, and this vote was communicated to the Congress office. Next the Commission asked comrade Schneider to report on the situation in Petrograd.

Being pressed for time, he gave only a bare outline and asked us to support the resolution on reorganising the Peasants' Union into Soviets, in Congress. The proposal was later voted through by the Congress.

That was the only question put on the agenda between August 5 and 7 1917 that had not already been anticipated in Gulyai-Polye.

Upon our return, after a series of reports, the Gulyai Polye Peasants' Union was transformed into a Soviet: there was no amendment of its principles, however, nor of its methods with an eye to the struggle for which it was intensively training the peasants: it invited them to help it drive

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<sup>1</sup> Skromny means modest (Translator's note)

the employers out of the factories and to abolish the property rights of the latter over public undertakings.

While we were involved in these purely formal transformations, the Pan-Russian Democratic Conference was opening in Moscow on August 14: at it our dearly beloved and honoured comrade P.A. Kropotkin appeared on the platform.

Our Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group was dumbfounded at this news, though we understood very well how our old friend, after so many years of exertion, constantly exiled and exclusively preoccupied in his old days with humanitarian notions, might have had difficulty, once back in Russia, in refusing to support that conference. But all such considerations were pushed into the background by the tragic circumstance that followed.

Inside ourselves, we condemned our aged friend for his participation in the conference, naively imagining that the aged apostle of revolutionary anarchism was turning into a sentimental old man, seeking peace and quiet and looking for the strength to apply his knowledge to life once more. But that condemnation remained unspoken, and was never made known to our enemies: for, in the deepest recesses of our souls, Kropotkin was still the anarchist movement's greatest and sturdiest theorist for us, its apostle. We knew that, were it not for his advanced years, he would have placed himself in the van of the Russian Revolution and would have been anarchy's unchallenged leader.

Were we right or not? The fact remains that we never ever discussed the problem of Kropotkin's participation in the Pan-Russian Democratic Conference in Moscow with our political enemies.

So we heeded what Kropotkin said and our enthusiasm waned. We did indeed feel that he would always remain dear and close to us, but the Revolution summoned us down a different road. For reasons of a purely artificial nature, the Revolution was passing through a stationary period, it was being garrotted by all of the parties that were partners in the 'Provisional Government'. Now, day by day the latter were becoming stronger and more sure of themselves, posing a standing threat of counter-revolution.

## Chapter Eleven: Kornilov's March on Petrograd

Around August 20 1917, our group looked into the allocation and utilisation of its resources. The meeting was one of its most serious. As I have said before, none of us had sufficient familiarity with anarchist theory. We were all only peasants and workers without any real education. Moreover, the anarchist school did not exist. What little we did know we had extracted over the years from reading the works of Kropotkin and Bakunin or from endless discussion with the peasants, to whom we vouchsafed all that we had read and understood. What we knew we owed above all to comrade Vladimir Antoni, known as 'Zarathustra'.

In the course of this highly important meeting, we reviewed a series of pressing questions and we saw clearly that the Revolution was being strangled by the statism that was threatening to stifle it. It was turning pale, weakening, but clinging to life and might yet emerge from the supreme struggle victorious. Its help would come chiefly from the revolutionary peasant masses, who would throw off the noose and free it of this blight, the Provisional Government, and all its satellite parties.

In short, we arrived at the following conclusions:

From the outset, the Revolution had presented the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist groups with a categorical alternative which urgently required a decision from us today: were we to go to the masses, organise them and create the Revolution with them, or else abstain and forswear the social revolution. It could no longer be a question of sticking to group activity, of making do with bringing out pamphlets and newspapers or organising meetings. With decisive developments on the horizon, the anarchists would be running the risk of finding themselves, if not utterly isolated from the masses, at least trailing in the wake of their movement.

Anarchism, by its very nature, could not take on such a role. The only problem was that lack of understanding and revolutionary zeal in its adepts—groups and federations—was threatening to drag it down that path.

Any party of struggle—and the revolutionary anarchist party more than any other—must strive to carry the masses with it in time of insurrection. Whenever the masses begin to show confidence in it, it must, without letting itself be carried away, follow the tortuous thread of events and seize the moment when it must cast aside the twists of the route followed so far and steer the working people away from them. That was a long-standing method, but not one yet tried by our group. It was one that could only be put into practice once our movement should develop in accordance with a strategic plan devised in advance, without which the various groups would be oblivious of each other and would lack cohesiveness in their action. Such a movement could certainly be conjured up in the very moment of revolution, but it would be impossible to instil in it a life that would last or give it a credo that would steer the rebellious masses towards their ultimate release from economic, political and moral encumbrances. There would be a pointless

waste of human lives sacrificed in a struggle that may be necessary and proper in terms of its aims, but which would also be an unequal one.

Having monitored the anarchist movement in the towns over a period of seven months, our group could no longer ignore the fact that many militants were absolutely smothering the movement and preventing it from ridding itself of its traditional disorganised mass movement.

This is why it was throwing itself with renewed energy into the study of problems so far unresolved by the anarchist movement, such as, for instance, the problem of coordinating the activities of the several groups in the revolutionary struggle in progress. None of the federations from the Russian Revolution of February had devised a solution, yet each one of them was publishing its resolutions and pointing out the new route to be followed.

That is how, after a frantic search for the lodestone-idea in the anarchist writings of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, we arrived at the conclusion that our Gulyai-Polye group could neither imitate the urban anarchist movement nor abide by its word. We should count on no one therefore to help the enslaved countryside to find its way during this critical phase of the revolution. No political party should shake the peasants' conviction that they—and they alone—had the power to alter the character of the Revolution, and that neither the parties nor the government in the villages.

The group's members spread out among the peasants and workers retaining nothing but their publicity and information bureau. They helped them find their bearings in the Revolution as it stood by word and deed, and to inject greater intensity into the struggle.

Shortly after this decision as we were already beginning to notice the results of our activities in the region, we were convinced that we had been right as to the cause of the stagnation of the Revolution and as to the criticality of the moment. In point of fact, the Revolution was caught in a noose. It would have been enough to tighten it just a little more in order to strangle the life out of it altogether.

The introduction of capital punishment at the front was ample proof that Revolutionary soldiers were to perish on the outer front while counter-revolutionaries could persist with their handiwork in the very heart of the Revolution. Some military units were absorbing the spirit of the Revolution, were fraternising with the workers in the towns and the peasants in their villages. They were becoming aware that they were the slaves of militarism, and were trying to deploy the artillery and machine-guns in their possession against their enemies—and that was why they were driven out of the rear where they were considered a threat to the growing strength of the reactionaries.

Seeing the course mapped out for the reinforcement of the power of the bourgeoisie who had already recovered from their defeat and were poised to strike back, we were increasingly convinced that the method we had chosen to help the working people get their proper bearings in the welter of revolutionary events, was the right one. It was vital, however, that it be complemented by precise directives.

What did we achieve in this regard? This: from the end of August onwards, the peasants had understood us completely and no longer let their energies be dissipated in different political groupings incapable of achieving anything strong and lasting in the Revolution.

The more the peasants came to understand us, the more solid became their belief in themselves and their direct role: that of abolishing on the one hand, by an act of revolution, the right of private ownership of the land and declaring that land to be the property of the nation, and on the

other, following an understanding with the proletariat of the towns, removing every possibility of new privileges and of the power of the few over others.

## Chapter Twelve: Resistance to the counter-revolution spreads through the villages

So, the bourgeoisie was disarmed and its weaponry divided up among the revolutionary peasants. This was achieved without bloodshed.

A Congress of Soviets, called for the purpose of probing the origins and aims of General Kornilov's movement, was inaugurated. It signified its approval, not merely for the formation by the Gulyai-Polye Soviet and by some other organisations, of a Committee for Defence of the Revolution, but also for all the measures taken by that soviet prior to the summoning of the congress, and it asserted that the time to act had arrived.

It then turned to Kornilov's advance on Petrograd, a march that by then had been halted and it stressed once again that it regarded as criminal the dereliction of the external front. It resolved to maintain that front, necessary if the revolution was to have protection against the external enemy, and invited the toilers to crush the movement of Kornilov's supporters once and for all.

The congress looked into still other problems, endorsed the announcement that private property rights had been abolished in our region, and turned its attention to the agrarian question.

The anarchist-communist group volunteered to read out its report on this issue. It was given a reading by comrades Krat and Andrei Semenota. It dealt mainly with practical measures for abolishing the rights of the pomeschiki and Kulaki over the enormous fine landed estates which they were incapable of cultivating by their own unaided efforts. The anarchist-communist group proposed to expropriate them without further ado, and to organise, upon these estates, free agrarian communes involving, so far as possible, these same pomeschiki and kulaki as participants:—and if the latter refused to join the family of toilers and expressed the wish to go it alone, each toiling on his own behalf, to allocate them their quotient of the national assets which they had purloined and to endow them with the means of making a living without being partners in the agrarian communities.

The Congress asked the farming Committee of Gulyai-Polye to devise a position on the agrarian question.

Comrade Krat was a member of this Committee. With the approval of the other committee members, he spelled out what had been undertaken by them in this sphere, stressing the agreement that existed between their finding and those of the anarchist-communist group that had just been given a hearing, and he pointed out that this question had been written by Gulyai-Polye into the agenda of the regional Congress of farming Committees and that that Congress had accepted their theses as the basis of a study of the matter in hand.

The Congress of soviets, in complete agreement—as I have already said—with the Soviet of the workers' trades union, the farming Committee and the anarchist communist group, scrutinised

both reports with a perfect awareness of its revolutionary duty towards oppressed labour upon whose liberation they had only now determined.

Here is the resolution which it passed on the matter:

‘The regional congress of the toilers of Gulyai-Polye strenuously condemns the pretensions of the Provisional Government of Petrograd and of the Ukrainian Central Rada of Kiev to direct the lives of the toilers and invites local Soviets and the entire proletarian organised populace to ignore all governmental orders.

The people must be sovereign in their own affairs. The time has at last come to make a reality of their age-old dream. Henceforth the land, the factories and plants must belong to the toilers.

The peasants must be masters of the land, the workers masters of the workshops and factories.

It falls to the peasants to expel from their lands all those pomeschiki and Kulaki who refuse to labour with their own hands, and to organise on their rural estates free agrarian communes made up of volunteer peasants and workers. Congress acknowledges that the initiative behind this decision originated from the anarchist-communist group and commends the implementation of the decision to it.

Congress hopes that the local Soviets and farming Committees will place all of the technical means at their disposal wholly at the discretion of that group with a view to the common task to be accomplished.’

Then the Congress expressed the assurance that the consolidation by the toilers of the gains of the revolution, opposition from their enemies notwithstanding, would be followed, not just in our region, but in the whole of the Ukraine and Russia, by the wholesale expropriation of all the collective undertakings enjoyed by the bourgeoisie and the State.

Towards the close of the Congress proceedings, a certain number of communes hitherto loyal to the government, made it known by means of a telephone message sent from Aleksandrovsk that agents of the Aleksandrovsk Communal Committee, of the soviet of Peasant, Worker, Soldier and Cossack Deputies and of the government’s commissar were touring the villages, organising meetings and inviting the peasants to boycott the Congress of Soviets of Gulyai-Polye, which was capable of having mooted issues that only the Constituent Assembly was fitted to pronounce upon, stating indeed that, although comprised of peasants, the Congress was devising to these problems solutions that were contrary to the peasants’ interests, and that the members of its Bureau, averred enemies of the toilers, were utterly ignorant of the laws of the revolution and thus were in revolt against the Provisional Revolutionary Government led by Kerensky, and against the Revolution’s supreme tribunal, the Constituent Assembly.

To these messages I added an envelope received by the Gulyai-Polye communal Committee containing instructions from the government commissar of the said district to prohibit N. Makhno from all social activity in Gulyai-Polye: he was, the document alleged, wanted by the State courts for having divested the pomeschiki and kulaki of their weapons.

Having taken note of all this, the Congress summoned the Bureau of the Gulyai-Polye communal committee and invited it to participate in the discussion of these messages and, above all, of the letter concerning me.

After a welter of abuse directed at the government agents touring the villages and at the government commissar, the assembly passed the following resolution:

‘The Congress of Soviets of the Gulyai-Polye region and the Gulyai-Polye Soviet refuse to acknowledge, for themselves or for the toilers who have endowed them with full powers, any authority and countenance no punishment handed down by the government’s commissar or by

the Aleksandrovsk communal committee and they salute N. Makhno as a friend and pioneer in the matters of revolutionary social issues.

The anarchist N. Makhno has been delegated by the erstwhile Peasants' Union together with six other members, to the communal Committee of Gulyai-Polye for the purpose of monitoring its work on a permanent basis. The Peasants' Soviet, following reorganization of the Union, has confirmed that decision.

Congress endorses the appointment and objects to the unconscionable intrusion of the district Committee and of the commissar into the business of local assemblies.'

(Minutes of the Congress, Book 2, 1917).

This resolution I dispatched to the government commissar, citizen I.K. Mikhno.

But that was not the end of the affair.

The anarchist-communist group asked the Congress for a two-hour suspension of its business, intending, once the session resumed, to deliver an important item concerning the current situation:

An interval of three hours was decided upon. This was used by the delegates to exchange personal opinions. As for our group, it availed of the suspension to organise a meeting and charged me, together with comrade Antonov, to deliver a report on 'counter-revolution in the town and district of Aleksandrovsk.'

We delivered it just as soon as the congress resumed its business.

I see no purpose in reviewing here the ideas contained within it: but I wish with all my heart that those who go to the peasants without knowing them, but with a high opinion of themselves, might listen to the delivery of such reports, if ever any are submitted in the name of our anarchist groups. There is a lot for them to learn from them, and the echo which they draw from the masses of the people will afford them some grasp of the peasants' mentality. Thus will they learn once and for all that the latter will never approach them for advice or permission a propos of anything to do with their own, independent and fruitful revolutionary action.

It is up to us to go to them and to strive to understand them.

After having given the report a hearing, the Congress passed the following resolution:

The Congress of the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region enjoins the Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies regularly to mandate spokesmen N. Makhno and V. Antonov, members of the peasant anarchist-communist group, and to send them as delegates from the Soviet and the Congress to the factory workers and port employees of Aleksandrovsk so that they may discover their true feelings about the antirevolutionary policy pursued by the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies elected by them.

'Only thus,' said the Congress in its resolution, 'shall we revolutionary peasants be able to assess the relative strengths of our enemies and ourselves.'

(Extract from the Minutes of the Workers' Congress in Gulyai-Polye, September 1917).

Congress then went on to examine other items on the agenda. Then, once having determined upon publication of the minutes and the sending out of these to the local Soviets, it broke up.

The attitude of the revolutionary peasants vis à vis their lords and masters during the first six months of the Revolution, an attitude reinforced by the September congress, helped to bolster our group's standing in the area.

Increasingly it drew the attention of the communal Committees.

But this was not achieved without a hitch. We expended a lot of effort before we managed to overcome the resistance within the group to the principle of a regular organisation, and our

position in the enslaved villages was firmly established only when we had adopted a sturdy organisation and when every active member of the Bureau acted in concert with the group as a whole.

V. Antonov, Sokruta and Kalinichenko—in the soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies.

Petrovski, Sereguin, Mironov. P. Sharovski, L. Schneider—in the factory Committees.

N. Makhno, Sereguin, Antonov—on the Soviet of the metalworkers' trades union and their sickness benefit fund.

A. Marchenko, A. Semenyuta, Prokop Sharovski, F. Krat, Isodor Liouty, Pavel Kostelev, the brothers Makhno, Stepan Shepel, Grigor Sereda—on the Peasants' Soviet and the Farming Committee.

This helped to bend all our efforts towards one common objective. Each of us was aware of the goal to be achieved and shouldered his portion of the burden of responsibility.

Moreover, this earned our group a closer attachment to the bulk of the toilers and enabled it the better to get the anarchist idea, in the social sense of the word, over to the peasants along with the necessity of keeping an eye on the attitude of the Provisional Government, the Ukrainian Central Rada and its Secretariat, just when the latter were at their most obstructive towards the practical realisation of revolutionary principles.

The toilers of the region openly declared in their congresses that they were scrupulously monitoring the actions of their oppressors and were making ready to take up arms against them.

From the end of August 1917 onwards, all at the region's Communal Committees began to speak out against certain orders from the government. Drawn up in advance at local gatherings, these objections were passed on to us by delegates and then a final draft was devised.

Nevertheless, and despite the apparent class consciousness of the toilers—a consciousness that was leading them along the road towards moral and material independence and towards unrestricted freedom, for which they stood ready to shed their blood, and which they wanted to feel in them and all about them, thereby achieving a society knowing no authority—despite this tendency so very pronounced in them, the concept of the abolition of private ownership of the land, factories and workshops, enunciated by the Gulyai-Polye Committee for Defence of the Revolution and endorsed by the Regional toilers' congress, could not fully be put into effect.

The Provisional Government, abetted by Kerensky's party (Right Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks) having, as a result, at their disposal the local authorities and troops who, in this region, held aloof from the masses and were ignorant of their aspirations, ended by gaining the upper hand. It curtailed the revolutionary impetus of the toilers who had gone beyond the programmes of those parties by calling for complete freedom, and it thwarted the implementation of the healthy and productive will of the people.

So it was, for a time at least, that the privileges of the bourgeoisie enjoyed insolent triumph.

Those who, while professing to believe in socialism, looked upon it as merely a game, incontrovertibly had a hand in this outcome. The toilers of Gulyai-Polye, who had boldly striven to become the unchallenged masters of freedom and happiness, this time made do with withholding farm rents from the pomeschiki and with placing lands, tools and livestock under the supervision of the farming Committees until spring so as to prevent the pomeschiki from selling them.

Impotent, bewildered, the toilers were painful to behold. Their manifest inferiority impelled them to look for reinforcements.

But where were these to be found?

In the end they realised that they could rely only on themselves. They closed ranks, seeking to build up sufficient strength to be able to liberate everyone from the obnoxious tyranny of the State.

## Chapter Thirteen: Visit to the Aleksandrovsk factory workers.

Despite the hostility which held sway in all government institutions and in the workers' Soviet of Aleksandrovsk vis à vis the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region, the delegates from the Gulyai-Polye Soviet and from the Congress, which is to say comrade Antonov and myself, set off to present to the workers of those factories a report on 'counter-revolution in the town and district of Aleksandrovsk,' for we were convinced that revolutionary Gulyai-Polye commanded some influence there.

The authorities received us with diffidence, but did not dare prevent us from visiting all the factories and workshops, familiarising the workers with the thoughts of the peasants, what steps they aimed to take in pursuit of their revolutionary endeavour, and at the same time educating ourselves as to what they thought, the plans they were laying for the future, despite the counter-revolution surrounding them on every side and which, in their name, had spread its activities into the countryside.

So we set off without the slightest misgiving.

The Gulyai-Polye Soviet and the trades union had promised to organise an attack against Aleksandrovok in the event of the authorities' attempting to place us under arrest.

By way of a beginning, then, we went along to the Soviet and asked the Bureau to indicate the most convenient place in which to start our tour of the factories lest any be left out and lest we waste our time to no purpose.

Having been asked by the Bureau of the Soviet what our purpose was, we produced our mandates. After a short deliberation, they furnished us with the requested information and inspected our mandates. But we did not adhere to the instructions issued by the Soviet.

We went along to the anarchist Federation and invited comrade Nikiforova to act as our guide and aide in our mission and all three of us set off for the factories.

There, we presented our credentials to the factory Committees. The latter promptly summoned all the workers together to listen to what we had to say to them on the peasants' behalf.

For several days we visited the factories and workshops like this, explaining to the work-force the counter-revolutionary activity conducted in their name in the villages, and the resistance to it from the peasants.

They heard us out with especial attentiveness, passed resolutions taking the attitude of their Soviet to task and expressed their gratitude to us and to all from the Gulyai-Polye region for having unmasked the hateful machinations which, in connivance with the governmental organisations, were being pursued in their Soviet's name throughout the entire district.

On more than one occasion our audience included members of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, of the communal Committee, agents of the government commissar and even the commissar for war in the flesh—the Social Revolutionary S. Popov. All of these combated

our reports with a vitriol that only those with unchallenged control of the situation could have indulged themselves in.

All to no avail however. The workers told them:

‘We don’t believe you any more, for in letting the bourgeoisie guide you by the nose, you have blinded us to a whole creative aspect of the Revolution. You wanted us to support it, yes, but without our having any right to develop or extend it.’

On the evening of the third day, we still had one more report to deliver at the munitions plants, the erstwhile Badovsky factories.

We went along and asked the sentry to grant us admittance to the military workshops’ Committee: but, without uttering a word he slammed the door in our faces. We shouted to him through the grille that we had come on behalf of the peasants to deliver a message to the soldier-workers. A member of the Soldiers’ Committee was sent for and he informed us through the grille that he knew all that but could not let us in, the war commissar, Social-revolutionary S. Popov, having given instructions that under no pretext were we to get among the soldiers. At this point, some groups of soldiers began to cluster behind the grille and I addressed myself directly to them: ‘Comrade soldiers! Who’s in charge here? The commissar whom you yourselves voted on to the communal Committee? Or yourselves? Aren’t you ashamed, comrades, to have put yourselves in such a position that the representatives of the peasants, your mothers and fathers, your brothers and sisters, are denied access to you?’

Shouts went up from the cluster of soldiers: ‘Where’s the Committee? Bring the Committee here! Let it open the gates and admit the peasants’ representatives. Otherwise we’ll admit them ourselves.’

Some bareheaded soldiers rushed to open the gates to us, ushered us into their mess and showered us with questions about Gulyai-Polye and its activities.

Around ten of them surrounded me and said: ‘We’re all Left Social Revolutionaries; there are also some Bolsheviks and some anarchists among us, but we can do nothing here. At the slightest indication of revolutionary activity we are sent to the front against the Germans and others are sent for in our place. Do what you can to help us, comrade Makhno. We intend to recall from the Soviet of the communal Committee all soldier representatives and to appoint others who reflect our thinking.’

I told them that the peasants had entrusted us with a specific mission and that insofar as it corresponded to their revolutionary viewpoint, they should rejoice at its success and try to make a contribution towards it.

We began our report. The soldiers from the workshops in the rear listened to us eagerly, tried to really understand, put questions and make their delight obvious.

When we invited them to organise themselves and to contact the peasants of the district through the good offices of the Gulyai-Polyai region, and thus to form a united front to take on the counter-revolution, shouts went up: ‘What counter-revolution? All power to the hands of the revolutionaries! From where can the counter-revolution come?’

So shouted Commissar for War, the Social Revolutionary Popov, surrounded by his supporters.

When comrade Antonov said in answer to him that it was precisely this ‘revolutionary power’ that was fomenting counter-revolution, commissar Popov, the Social Revolutionary Martinov and other socialists became embroiled in a heated argument.

It emerged that the rearguard workshops were under the sway of the Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats. It was not so much a matter of influence in the strict sense, as of constraint wielded by those who wielded the power.

The bulk of the soldiers were torn between several political outlooks, including Right Social Revolutionaries, and Menshevik Social democrats, but these two factions did not amount to a majority. But given that any display of revolutionary opinion—the soldiers told me this again, straight out—even a first offence ran the risk of reprisal in the form of being dispatched to the external front they refrained from speaking and, meanwhile, were prey to the statist power of the Right social Revolutionaries and Menshevik Social Democrats.

I was so moved by the check this kept on them that I immediately asked them to recall all these socialists from all the positions they had entrusted to them and indeed to eject from the workshops any who were on the premises. I promised the soldiers to intercede with the Departmental Commissariat of War to ensure that there was no infringement of their interests: in fact I was acquainted with the Commissar who was the anarcho-syndicalist comrade Grunbaum, a rather fine administrator who displayed revolutionary vigour. If need be, they had to take to the streets to stand by their rights. Gulyai-Polye would always back them up.

My summons heartened the soldiers. They wanted to drive the Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats out of the workshops on the spot. Had we not opposed this on the prompting of our revolutionary consciences, they would have lynched them.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that we managed to prevent them from perpetrating that act, unworthy to be committed by revolutionaries against other revolutionaries. (However, in the events of 3–5 July, the agents of the government and of these ‘revolutionaries’ had murdered our comrade Assin and many other revolutionaries and anarchists at the villa Durnovo in Petrograd).

The soldier-workers of the rear workshops, in response to our report passed a resolution definitively recalling their representatives from the Soviet and communal Committee of Aleksandrovsk, unless these two institutions had been reorganized by the workers—in addition to another resolution calculated to support the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Polye.

Whereupon we left the workshops: the soldiers beseeched us to tell the peasants that they would always be with them in the struggle for freedom and they requested that they be visited more often with similar reports.

It was growing late.

Pressed for time, we snatched a meal in the home of some worker comrades and made our way back to our rooms.

That very night, the commissar for war, Social Revolutionary Popov and the government commissar K.B. Mikhno decided to have the anarchist Nikiforova secretly arrested for having escorted us to the workers without having been mandated by the peasants, and to have her treacherously locked up in prison. Their agents easily discovered her lodgings, seized her and carried her off by car to prison.

But unfortunately for the commissars as soon as morning came the workers learned of the arrest of the anarchist Nikiforova and promptly dispatched to the commissar’s headquarters a delegation charged with insisting upon her immediate release.

The commissars were nowhere to be found.

So the workers of the factories and workshops quit work, and, to the accompaniment of the factory alarm sirens, made their way with banners flying and singing revolutionary songs towards the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies.

While so proceeding and demonstrating their revolutionary solidarity they came across the chairman of the Soviet and Peasant and Worker Deputies, the Social Democrats Mochalyi and laid hands on him. A commission elected on the spot bundled him aboard a hackney cab, proceeded to the prison with him in tow and freed the anarchist Nikiforova.

When the workers' delegation, the Soviet's chairman and the anarchist Nikiforova joined the demonstrators parading in Cathedral Street, the workers picked up the anarchist and, passing her from group to group, carried her in triumph as far as the soviet, rejoicing at her release, congratulating her and cursing the Provisional Government and all its agents.

None of the commissars dared show himself to the workers on the rostrum of the Soviet. The anarchist Nikiforova alone mounted this platform and, with her voice ringing, summoned the workers to the struggle against the Government, for Revolution and for a society freed of all authority.

We concluded our report with an appeal addressed to the workers, inviting them to have done with the Aleksandrovsk Soviet whose antirevolutionary activity had gone too far. We knew its political complexion through the agents encountered in the villages and at congresses and our reports determined its fate in advance. The commissar's insolent treatment of our anarchist comrade, an act which, on the part of serious politicians was inexcusable from the political and above all from the tactical point of view, merely hastened the downfall of the Soviet, of the right SRs, the Menshevik SDs and Cadets who composed it.

Immediately, the workers determined to proceed as rapidly as possible with fresh elections. Within a few days the former representatives were recalled and others elected in their place in the majority of cases. Thus was formed a new Executive Committee of the Soviets of worker and Peasant Deputies of the Aleksandrovsk district.

Even then this new committee was made up not of workers directly committed to the task of their class but rather of people who, while being workers, were very close, in terms of their beliefs, to... in some cases the parties and organisations of the left SRs and Bolsheviks... and in others, a handful among us, the anarchists. The newly elected members broke up into factions and, from the moment they entered the Executive Committee they distorted and, had there not been any anarchists, would have distorted completely the very notion of revolution as perceived by the workers. However this new Soviet was not openly supportive of either the antirevolutionary communal committee of Aleksandrovsk, or of the government's commissar, which both insisted that the Gulyai-Polye communal committee prohibit me from engaging in any social activity on account of my having disarmed the bourgeoisie. Then again, the new Soviet did not ask that we restore to the bourgeoisie the weapons that we had seized from it.

After the fashion of highly-placed political and administrative institutions, it felt the need to ensure that each of its members had a portfolio under his arm, as if it had fallen to them to determine the fate of the Revolution.

And day after day they sat, devising the rules for their conduct. In point of fact, it was a most opportune time for such endeavours: the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs reached agreement on a number of issues and had broached the question of the blockade—a matter which the leaders of the two parties had yet to raise formally, but regarding which one could foresee that their response to it would be in the affirmative.

Comrade Antonov and I left Aleksandrovsk reluctantly. We would both have liked to spend a little more time there working among the workers, a number of whom had been honestly won over to the revolutionary cause. They stood out clearly from the multitude, but were affiliated to no political party. Their sympathies, though, lay with the anarchists. But we had embarked upon the task of organising among the peasants and, seeing that undertaking prosper, we had to return to it. And so we set off for Gulyai-Polye.

When we got back, we assembled all of the revolutionary, trades and community organisations and gave them a detailed report of our success in Aleksandrovsk. Whereupon a skhod-rally of all toilers was summoned: there too we delivered a detailed report of the welcome which had awaited us from the workers and the attentiveness with which they had listened to what we had told them about the counter-revolution in the town of Aleksandrovsk and in its district. Then we passed on what the workers and soldiers of the rear workshops wanted the peasants and workers of our revolutionary Gulyai-Polye region to know. Our success among the Aleksandrovsk workers delighted everyone.

But the revolutionary toilers thirsted after action.

I suggested to the peasants that they appoint some individuals capable of assisting the Farming Committee and proceed, without delay, to share out the estates belonging to the churches, monasteries and pomechiki: for these lands needed to be planted before the winter or tilled for the spring.

They set resolutely to work, but when they arrived in the fields and began the allocation, they discovered that for that year at any rate, each person had to hold on to the lands which he had tilled and planted himself with winter cereals, and it was decided that each one should set aside a given sum for the benefit of the community so as to maintain the public funds which subsidised the needs of the commune: those peasants who might not have done any ploughing would not be expected to contribute anything that year.

Even so, generally speaking they seized hold of the lands in need of ploughing before winter came and divided them up, paying not the slightest heed to the threats from the government's agents. A substantial number of districts, communes and regions followed the example set by the peasants of Gulyai-Polye.

Our own anarchist-communist group and the members of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies dispatched reliable comrades in every direction with written appeals urging the peasants to act to the same purpose with the utmost energy. We hoped that the local successes of revolutionary direct action would put paid to the agrarian question once and for all, just prior to the summoning of the Constituent Assembly and would thus also determine the fate of private property rights over the factories, workshops and other public enterprises. Indeed, with the example of the peasants before them, the workers would no longer be inclined to remain enslaved to these bosses and undertakings, which they would proclaim community property and place them under the immediate supervision of their 'factory Committees' and 'Unions'.

This would signal the start of the struggle against the political authority of the government (provided the anarchist groups in the towns were ready for it) and thus the demise of the very principles of government would become a fait accompli. It would remain only to bury those principles as thoroughly as possible so that, no longer having any place in life, they might never be resurrected.

In Gulyai-Polye and its environs, public life became frantic in its pace, to the tremendous delight of the revolutionary anarchist peasants and workers.

## Chapter Fourteen: The Overtures of the Departmental Soviet to Gulyai-Polye.

While comrade Antonov and I were in Aleksandrovsk presenting our report on the counter-revolution to the workers in the factories on behalf of the Peasants' Union and the Soviet of Gulyai-Polye, our activity caught the particular attention of the Departmental Executive Committee of the Soviet of Worker, Peasant and Soldier deputies of Ekaterinoslav. With great political astuteness, this Committee did not resort to reprisals as some dull-witted and thoughtless politicians might have done. It employed 'political wisdom'; reaching beyond district perimeters, it suggested to the Gulyai-Polye Soviet that the latter delegate a permanent representative to the Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets.

In the course of debates regarding this suggestion, the Gulyai-Polye Soviet was startled by the following fact: there already was a delegate from Gulyai-Polye on the Departmental Executive Committee, a delegate elected by the Departmental Congress; and the Executive Committee was now suggesting a second, chosen directly by the Soviet of Gulyai-Polye.

This circumstance forced our soviet to revise its previous thinking, according to which it had, from the very outset, clearly sketched out its role in the revolutionary endeavour, namely, the repudiation of all direction from a higher agency as having quite different notions from its own of the very essence of the Revolution. So it seemed that the answer to be delivered to the Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets was, in essence, already in existence for a long time and that it remained only to frame it at a formal meeting and put it down on paper.

However, having turned back to our initial revolutionary ideas, we ran up against problems which, in the course of practical achievements, had derived from them. In fact, they required that we blend completely with the workers so that together we might proclaim our age-old rights over the land, the factories and so on, and so that, again together, we might make them a reality in our lives.

Guided by this idea, we found it crucial to study the Executive Committee's proposal thoroughly and to anticipate what the impact of acceptance or rejection of it might be upon Gulyai-Polye's revolutionary endeavour.

The proposal was subjected to thorough discussion. But first we had to establish precisely what the ties were uniting, a propos of the intensification of the revolutionary movement, the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region and those of other regions, and to see whether our direct representation on the Executive Committee might not give rise to conflicts of ideas inside our ranks.

In short, it was apparent that Gulyai-Polye's influence was very far-reaching, that the vigorous Kamyshevats region was working hand in hand with us, that many others in the Berdyansk, Marindpol, Pavlograd and Bakhmur jurisdictions were sending us delegates to sound us out on our attitude towards the enemies of the revolution (i.e. the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada) and to discover the means we were using in the struggle to recover the

land, factories, and workshops and transfer these wholly to the peasants' and workers' organisations.

Furthermore, a number of toilers from the aforementioned districts had, in their own territories, asserted through revolutionary acts their solidarity with our ideas concerning the agrarian issue and the right of communal committees to resolve for themselves matters of public interest and to insist upon the implementation of their ordinances.

The Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and the anarchist-communist group looked upon all this as the fruits of their concerted efforts.

Preoccupied above all with unity, the Soviet resolved the matter by opting for acceptance and decided to send a trustworthy and capable comrade from the anarchist-communist group to attach himself to the Departmental Executive Committee.

The grounds behind this response were spelled out by members of the Soviet who were not affiliated to our group. They deemed themselves revolutionaries and sympathised with the anarchists, but as toilers and as bold defenders of the rights of labour they remained within the bosom of the peasant and worker masses.

The Resolution might be summarised thus: 'The toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region are among the most steadfast advocates of expropriation of the means of production and consumer products for the benefit of all toilers. But this notion does not make them lose their heads. They recognise that this question, one of the most important ones, can only be successfully resolved if the idea of expropriation is expressed and implemented in several regions simultaneously or, at the very least, at very rapid intervals.'

This is why it is important and necessary that the Soviet, the anarchist-communist group and the Soviet of the trades union, being favourably disposed towards our ideas, should utilise their resources to plant it as deeply as possible in the masses of regions sympathetic with Gulyai-Polye in that, at the moment of truth, the support of those regions is of capital significance if we wish to see our theses spread thereafter throughout the whole country.

As the instigator of this great movement, Gulyai-Polye will have to assume the leadership of it, but it will only be able to do so when it has seen the idea realised on its home ground.

From this angle it is important for the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies of Gulyai-Polye to have a direct representative on the Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets.

The anarchist-communist group and the Soviet of the metalworkers' and woodworkers' trades union should, in consequence, not oppose, but rather support us instead.'

It was for these reasons that the anarchist-communist group and the trades union's Soviet pronounced themselves in favour of dispatching a representative to the Departmental Executive Committee: and as the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies was insistent that it should be a member of our group, we designated comrade Leon Schneider, a veteran organiser.

The position was particularly worrying. Kerensky was threatening the left with a backlash. The revolutionary anarchists had to be ready at that precise moment either to launch armed struggle against the Provisional Government or to go to ground.

I was perfectly well aware that, for want of solid organisation, our anarchist movement was weak in the towns and virtually nonexistent in the villages. So our group, as had been decided previously, should not count upon anyone other than itself and be prepared for any eventuality. The Committee issued comrade L. Schneider with papers certifying that he was commissioned to represent it on the Departmental Executive Committee. The anarchist-communist group advised him to work in conjunction with the Ekaterinoslav anarchist Federation. The soviet of the

metalworkers' and woodworkers' trades union awarded him full powers to negotiate with the Ekaterinoslav local industrial Committee to ensure that the Gulyai-Polye foundries might receive, in time and in adequate amounts, the raw materials needed if work was not to grind to a halt at the plant or, if it did have to stop, to ensure that the rundown affected only those branches least essential to the region's population.

And so comrade Schneider, delegate of the Workers' and Peasants' Soviet, set out for Ekaterinoslav to represent revolutionary Gulyai-Polye on the Departmental Executive Committee. He was welcomed with open arms. But at the end of two sittings of the Executive Committee, at which he spoke, the attitude of the Committee's leaders changed abruptly and his position became difficult. Some Committee members asked that he be stripped of the right to participate in decision-making and be left only with the right to participate in discussions.

He pointed out that he had never been entitled to share in the decision-making of the Executive committee in that no such right had been conferred on him by the Gulyai-Polye Soviet. He had only been elected delegate so as to monitor all new measures taken by that Committee in relation to the revolution, and to brief it on what had been done in the same regard by the toilers of Gulyai-Polye: in this way, it would be up to Congress itself to fill in any gaps which might exist in the autonomous revolutionary feats accomplished by the toilers of the various communes or regions.

In the wake of such a frank pronouncement, many members of that Committee asked that the question of the complete exclusion of the Gulyai-Polye representative be included in the agenda. But at this point, such an exclusion would have entailed a boycott of that Committee by Gulyai-Polye and a whole series of like-minded revolutionary regions: it would have been demonstrated to the mass of toilers in the whole department and indeed well beyond its boundaries that the Departmental Executive Committee of Ekaterinoslav was lagging behind the revolutionary masses locally in the work of the Revolution. Now, the boycott procedure is not palatable to anyone in time of acute revolution, but it was especially intimidating to the politicians.

The Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets grasped this very well and reluctantly retained Gulyai-Polye's representative within its ranks, allocating him a seat in some section... the industrial section, if my memory serves me well.

Each week, our delegate would come to Gulyai-Polye to report back to the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies, to the workers' trades union and to his anarchist-communist group and to listen to the discussion of his reports. Then, refreshed and reinvigorated he would be off to spend the whole week in Ekaterinoslav.

Through his good offices, the Soviet of the trades union came to an arrangement with the local industrial Committee and received, in time, the raw materials needed by the plant.

The Regional Congress of Farming Committees set aside a certain number of pomeschiki estates to be turned, with the aid of volunteers, into agrarian communes.

Peasants and workers banded together either on the basis of families or small affinity groups, or groups of 150–200 people, to form genuine free agrarian communes. Joy was on all their faces when they freely debated with one another what they should do while waiting for spring to arrive, what wheat should be planted, which variety would yield the plentiful harvest that was expected and which would be a great help to the Revolution, provided that the weather was fine, without too much drought, with the necessary rain at the desired time to moisten the chernozyom.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chernozyom = Especially fertile black soil.

'Only the planting of all holdings with good grain, and an abundant harvest will enable us to recover from the devastation of the war and will support the forces of the Revolution,' the peasants would say.

When asked, 'And what about the Provisional Government in Petrograd, and the Central Rada with its Kiev Secretariat? Aren't they outright enemies of the great revolutionary endeavour you wish to support, though?' their answer was always the same... 'But we are getting organised precisely in order to drive out the Provisional Government and to prevent the Central Rada and its Kiev Secretariat from coming to power. By spring, we hope to have an end of all these governments in these parts.' 'Who are you?' they were sometimes asked. 'We peasants and workers. You have been to Aleksandrovsk and seen that, even as we do, the workers want to live free and independent of all authority, all government and of all those other blights from who knows where.'

In September, in the course of our organising work among the peasants and workers, the pomeschic Mikhno, the government's commissar, dispatched a special envoy to us in Gulyai-Polye with the task of drawing up a dossier on me and on all who were disarming the bourgeoisie of the region.

That envoy ensconced himself in the militia office and asked that all the peasants and workers be summoned, as well as myself, for individual questioning.

But unfortunately for the commissar and his envoy, the Gulyai-Polye militia had only an errand boy's role and not that of a gendarme. It tipped me off and I myself went to see this envoy, intimating to him that he should gather up his papers forthwith and follow me to the Committee for Defence of the Revolution.

There I had him sit down on a chair and asked him to explain to me, unemotionally and in simple terms, the object of his arrival in Gulyai-Polye. He did what he could to furnish that explanation as calmly as I had commended, but, I know not why, did not seem able to manage it: his lips quivered, his teeth chattered, and he kept on alternately flushing and paling, his eyes fixed on the ground.

Then I invited him to copy down what I was about to say to him. And when, straining to put his hand on some paper, he had written out what I had dictated, I asked him to leave Gulyai-Polye within 20 minutes and the region within two hours.

And the special envoy from the government commissar of the Aleksandrovsk district departed at speed, a lot more quickly than the committee for Defence of the Revolution and I had been expecting, to rejoin his master in Aleksandrovsk.

From that day on, Gulyai-Polye received no more orders from the central authorities and no more envoys from Aleksandrovsk.

And so the end of September arrived. The great month of October was approaching, the October that gave its name to the second or great Russia's revolution.

## **Part Two**

# Chapter One: The October coup d'état in Russia.

The further coup d'état in October in Petrograd and in Moscow, and thereafter throughout the whole of Russia only reached us in the Ukraine in late November, early December 1917.

Up until December 1917 the only mention of the October coup d'état made to the toilers in the towns and villages of the Ukraine came in statements from the Central Pan-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossak Deputies, and in those by the Soviet of the people's commissars, by the revolutionary parties and groups and, in particular, the declarations of two of those parties... the Bolshevik Party and the Left Social Revolutionary Party; for these were the two parties who most astutely capitalised upon this period of the Russian revolution for the sake of achieving their aims. The ground was prepared for this grandiose upheaval, the handiwork of the workers and soldiers in the towns and of the peasants in the countryside, all directed against the Provisional Government and its shameful but fortunately vain efforts to smother the Revolution, by all the groupings which had found a place within the broad parameters of the Russian revolutionary current.

But those two parties... the first of them well organised, the second dancing obediently to the tune of the cunning Lenin... managed to win over the revolutionary masses at the right moment: and luring them behind with the formula: 'Power to the local Soviets of the Worker, Peasant and Soldier Deputies', and complimenting them upon their slogan 'The land to the peasants, the factory and workshop to the workers', they stemmed the Revolution: then, with enormous amounts of paper and huge numbers of printing presses at their disposal, they flooded the towns and the countryside with their manifestoes, statements and programmes.

In the aforementioned coup d'état in Petrograd, Moscow and other industrial towns, anarchists played an exceptionally salient part, in the van of the sailors, soldiers and workers. But, for want of structures they were unable to bring to bear upon the country a revolutionary influence comparable with that of these two parties which had formed a political bloc under the direction of that same guileful Lenin and knew precisely what they had to set about above all else at that time, and the degree of strength and energy at their disposal.

Their voice made itself heard across the country at the key moment, loudly clamouring for the age-old dream of the mass of the toilers: the conquest of land, bread and liberty.

Meanwhile the anarchists, disorganised, were unable to discover a way of exposing the ideological falsehoods and impoverishment of those two parties, to the masses... parties which, in order to seize the reins of the revolution, had recourse to essentially anti-governmental slogans utterly at odds with their underlying principles.

During the period of the counter-revolutionary strivings of the Provisional Government and its direct agents, the right-wing socialists and the Cadets, the masses of the toilers saw the Bolsheviks and the Left Social Revolutionaries as the defenders of their aspirations. They failed to note the deceitfulness and the ulterior motives of those political parties. Only the revolutionary

anarchists, anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists alike, could have taught them to be a little more discerning. But before the Revolution the anarchists, faithful in this respect to an old tradition, had neglected to bring their different groups together into one powerful formation and, come the Revolution, the pressing business of some among the workers and of others among the press, prevented them from giving any serious thought to their weakness and to bringing that weakness to an end by means of the establishment of an organisation which might have enabled them to influence the course of the revolutionary events in the country.

It is true that, shortly after the Revolution began, anarchist Federations and Confederations were formed, but the events of October demonstrated that these had not achieved their aims. It seemed that the communist and syndicalist anarchists ought to have set speedily to work to overhaul the form of their organisation, to render it more stable and more consonant with the social thrust of the Revolution. But alas! Not a thing was done in that regard!

And, partly for that very reason, and partly for other less important reasons, the anarchist movement, so lively and so full of revolutionary zeal, found itself tailing along in the wake of events and sometimes indeed, left out of them, unable to pursue an autonomous cause and to profit the Revolution by their ideas and their tactics.

Thus the political developments of October, developments that were to unleash the second, the great Russian Revolution, only began to make themselves felt in the Ukraine in December 1917.

From October to December, in the towns and villages in the Ukraine, the communal Committees... territorial units... metamorphasised into commissions of the Zemstvo<sup>1</sup>. To be sure the part played by the toilers in this metamorphosis was a minimal one and merely formal. In many regions, the peasants' representatives on the Communal Committees were not carried over on to the zemstvo commissions. Numerous Communal Committees were merely rebaptised as zemstvo commissions without the slightest tinkering with their structure. But officially the territorial unit of each region now was the zemstvo.

Gradually, a segment of the urban workers adopted an expectant attitude.

The peasants deemed this the most opportune moment to overthrow the authorities and to take their fate into their own hands. To this end, the peasants of the Zaporozhiye<sup>2</sup> and along the shores of the sea of Azov closely monitored the coup d'état that spread through the whole of Central Russia in the form of armed attacks against Kerensky's supporters, regarding this as the realisation of what they themselves had already attempted in their villages back in August 1917. Consequently that coup d'état was joyously welcomed and they strove to help it spread into their own territories. However the fact that this coup d'état had brought the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs to power was no cause for celebration by the Ukraine's revolutionary toilers. Unblinkered peasants and workers saw that as a further stage in the interference by authorities in the local revolutionary endeavours and, consequently, as yet another attack upon the People by the Authorities. As for the bulk of the Ukrainian toilers, the peasants of the enslaved villages in particular saw this new government as merely a government like all the rest: and they paid it no heed except when it robbed them through various taxes, recruited soldiers or otherwise interfered violently in their already arduous lives. They were often to be heard speaking their real opinion of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary authorities. They appeared to be in jest, but in

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<sup>1</sup> Elected local administration along the lines of general councils (Translator's note).

<sup>2</sup> An area downstream from the Dniepr rapids. (Translator's note)

reality were saying with the utmost seriousness, and at all times with suffering and hatred, that after they had driven off the durak<sup>3</sup> Nikolka Romanov, another durak by the name of Kerensky tried to replace him, but that he too had been seen off. ‘Now who’s going to act the durak at our expense? Lord Lenin?’ they asked. Others stated: ‘There is no doing without a durak’ (and by that word durak they always meant the government). ‘The town exists for that purpose only: its basic principles are bad: they favour the existence of the durak.’

The astute Lenin, having fully understood the town, installed as durak beneath the flag of Dictatorship of the Proletariat a band of people who made a good show of being familiar with that role but were in fact ignorant of it, but who were ready for anything, if only they could be in power and might bend other men and the entire human race to their will.

Lenin managed to raise the role of durak to hitherto unknown heights and thereby draw to himself not only the adepts of the political party closest to his own in terms of its revolutionary activity and historic pugnacity, ... the left SRs, who had become his half-beguiled disciples... but also some anarchists. It is true that this youthful spin-off from the old Social Revolutionary Party... the left SR Party... came to its senses after seven or eight months of servitude and set about resisting Lenin by every means, up to and including armed struggle. But that in no way alters the facts we have mentioned.

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<sup>3</sup> A word meaning imbecile. (Translator’s note).

## **Chapter Two: Elections to the constituent assembly: Our attitude vis à vis the parties in contention.**

Being hostile to the very idea of a Constituent Assembly, our group waged a campaign against the elections.

Under the impact of our propaganda, the majority of the region's population also repudiated the precept of a Constituent Assembly: a significant portion of it, however, did take part in the elections. This is down to the fact that the socialist parties, the Left SRs and Right SRs, the Menshevik SDs and the Bolshevik SDs, and the powerful Cadet party waged a dogged campaign throughout the country in favour of their lists of candidates. So the population of the country split up into numerous groups, thereby fragmenting its unity, and was split even on the question of socialisation of the land. This played right into the hands of the Cadets and Menshevik SDs who at that time were calling for the repurchase of the land by the peasants.

Our group, upon examining the activities of these parties—activities the upshot of which was the destruction of the unity of toilers—found the SRs and the Bolsheviks preferable to the Cadets and the SDs and, in favour of the former, refrained from active propaganda in favour of a boycott of the elections. To those of its members who wished to participate in the meetings laid on by the parties, it recommended that they advise those toilers who trusted in the Constituent Assembly and were keen to participate in the elections, to cast their votes for the Social Revolutionaries (the Left SRs and Right SRs offered a joint list, no. 3) or for the Bolsheviks (list no. 9).

Though there were numerous lists of candidates in the Ukraine, only three of these were attractive to the toilers... list No 3, that of the social Revolutionaries, list No 5... the Ukrainian list, a miscellaneous rag-bag of chauvinist-socialists and nationalists, and list No 9, that of the Bolsheviks. The SR and Bolsheviks lists (No 3 and No 9) were tremendously successful in those areas where the toilers had actively involved themselves in the election campaign. List no. 5, the 'Ukrainian' list attracted fewer votes than the two lists already mentioned on the left bank of the Dniepr.

The success of the left-wing socialist parties can be explained thus: the Ukrainian toilers, not misled by the policy of the chauvinists, had retained their quite characteristic revolutionary mentality and cast their votes for the revolutionary parties: furthermore, the 'Ukrainian liberation movement' remained entirely confined to a nationalist outlook.

The leaders of that 'movement', excepting two or three of them who, when all is said and done, also ended by going over to German militarism and marching against the Revolution, were the most motley individuals. This meant that into the ranks of the 'Ukrainian liberation movement', and even the most important posts, were drawn people who spoke Ukrainian, but who should have no place in any truly Ukrainian libertarian movement.

This bourgeois and chauvinistic outlook, the political culpability of the leaders of this 'movement' vis à vis the toilers and their dream of seizing freedom and the right to independence through direct revolutionary action inspired the toilers with a detestation of the very precept of the 'Ukrainian liberation movement'.

The revolutionary toilers of the Ukraine detected all of this in time and pitted themselves as a body against this 'movement', showing no pity to anyone who had anything to do with it.

Two or three months after the beginning of their active fight against the chauvinist party which had, in the Ukraine, disfigured the magnificent beginnings of the great Russian revolution, they found that they had been right to embark upon that fight with such speed and intensity.

True, it is not for us here to examine the profile of the Ukrainian chauvinist movement which did the Revolution so much harm. We must merely set out precisely the repercussions which the October coup d'état had, from the second day of its success in Petrograd and Moscow onwards, upon the toilers of the Zaporozhiye and the shores of the sea of Azov and, in particular, upon those of a whole series of regions lying within the districts of Aleksandrovsk, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Mariupol, Bakhmut and Pavlograd and which were under the influence of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies which they regarded as the trailblazer of the fight against the government.

Having followed the life of those regions with especial interest, let me state that during the first two months following the October coup d'état, which is to say, during November and December, the Ukrainian toilers simply rejoiced at it, and in no way amended their own local activities, while recognising that at the root of that coup d'état there had been the springs of a genuine revolution emanating from the very depths of the enslaved villages and oppressed townships, awakening at last.

Up until October, the Gulyai-Polye region had sought unstintingly to stamp the revolution with as powerful and determined a character as possible and to make it wholly independent of any notion of government.

Even when four official governments were set up in Ekaterinoslav at the end of 1917, each of them seeking to direct the revolutionary masses of the entire department and consequently squabbling and continually at daggers drawn with the rest, dragging the toilers into their fracas, even then the Gulyai-Polye region held aloof and quite independent from these factions which each had a turn at victory over the others.

Early in December, the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc triumphed in Ekaterinoslav. The Gulyai-Polye region acknowledged those parties as revolutionary, but instantly grasped the precise nature of the sentiments by which they were animated. Indeed the toilers declared: 'We have deemed the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs as revolutionaries by virtue of their tremendous activity in the revolution: we salute them as sturdy fighters: but we distrust them, for after triumphing over the bourgeoisie and the right-wing socialist parties that backed it in its counter-revolutionary struggle thanks to the support of our forces, they promptly established 'their' government which is redolent of all the governments which have been stifling us for centuries past. And it does not appear that theirs is in any particular hurry to capitalise upon its triumph in order to finally implement the principles of autonomous labour in the various localities, dispensing with orders or directives from above.'

Commissariats are set up everywhere. And they are more reminiscent of police institutions than of egalitarian committees made up of comrades eager to explain to us the best way of or-

ganising ourselves independently, without having to pay heed to leaders who, to date, have lived off our backs and done us nothing but harm.

And since this persuasion of revolutionary government is not to be found now and since in its place police institutions are being set up to issue us with orders instead of advice, it is not going to be any more evident later on. On the contrary, anyone who thinks differently and acts in contradiction with the orders received will in future incur the death penalty or find himself stripped of his freedom, to which we are committed above all else.'

Albeit vague, these impressions were quite correct and the toilers appreciated perfectly well that, at the cost of their blood and their lives, events were in train in which one evil was destroyed only to be replaced, on various pretexts, by another.

That is why they armed themselves in the Ukraine and thereby came closer to those whom they discovered treading out the same course as them, ..the Bolsheviks, the Left Social Revolutionaries and the anarchists.

But these first two groups mentioned knew what they were about and not only did they join forces, but also, each in its domain, they observed a flawless unity of action. This kept them even more before the eyes of the toilers and meant that they came to be described by a single name 'the Bolsheviks', a title under which they were often lumped along with them.

The masses looked upon this amalgam which made up their vanguard and said: 'We salute these revolutionaries with all our hearts: but we have no way of knowing if they will not wind up fighting among themselves to gain mastery over us and subject us wholly to their will. There is that tendency in them and so they are building up to a new and bloody contest by neglecting us toilers with our right to autonomous revolutionary action to a corner, on our knees before their selfish and criminal factional interests.'

And that obliged the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Polye to display even greater vigilance than usual.

## Chapter Three: The Departmental Congress.

An assembly of the Gulyai-Polye region's Soviet was organised in advance of the Departmental Congress of the Soviets of Peasant, Worker and Soldier Deputies due to be held in December. All of the delegates who attended were insistent that our representatives to the Departmental Congress be prepared for it, lest they fall under the influence of the agents of the political parties. They were to announce without hesitation that they had not come to the Congress to listen to reports from the government's agents and abide blindly by these, but rather to give an airing themselves to their own reports on the local activity of the toilers and to explain why they were conducting themselves so now and would never again act upon orders that might be handed down to them.

They were to convey our ideas precisely... namely that at that point the first duty of the toilers was to operate in such a way as to free every one of them from the authority of masters—from the mastery of Private Capital as well as from the mastery of Government.

The government, as a power, as a society that could not exist without oppression, pillage and murder, was to disappear beneath the blows of the revolutionary toilers pressing on enthusiastically towards a new free society.

We already knew about the convening of the Departmental Congress. It implied nothing new for us, for we had long since been putting that with which it was to occupy itself into action. It would be the duty of our delegates to bring to the attention of delegates from other regions this fact which, emanating from our own ideas, had to be re-enacted everywhere so that we might be understood by toilers throughout the whole country.

It was only after this stipulation that the delegates were appointed. They were N. Makhno and Mironov.

Then the assembly expressed all of its admiration and gratitude to us, its representatives: 'We have selected you, comrades, with the full consent of those who elected us. In your persons, we send to the Departmental Congress the worthiest of Gulyai-Polye's toilers, the first among equals.

'We are, all of us, certain that you will accomplish your mission as best you can. The instructions which we are issuing you with are not specific. And if we do issue you with them, it is only because we peasants are wont to note the finer aspects of our traditions. This strengthens the ties uniting us on the road of our shared revolutionary gains.'

In Gulyai-Polye such instructions and words along these lines always accompanied the election of delegates to the Departmental Congress or District Congress. If I have singled out this instance in particular, it is because it took place at a time when the Bolshevik camp—inclusive of the Left SRs—had already seized power in Ekaterinoslav and its environs, arrogating to itself, step by step, all of the popular gains of the revolution, and trying to warp the revolution itself.

The toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region were perfectly well aware that at the Departmental Congress in December, the principal role would be played by the agents of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, whose professed intentions lifted the veil on a governmental, statist premise.

Now, the workers of Gulyai-Polye had long been wont to reiterate at their reunions that the bloc of revolutionary parties which, they said, gave off a certain smell was not to be trusted, and they cautioned the toilers of other regions against it.

We were a day late in arriving at Ekaterinoslav, following the derailment of our train: but fortunately we were not late for the opening of the Congress. All the delegates were assembled, but the Congress had not yet begun. One sensed a certain disquiet and a measure of agitation in the organisers.

As I indicated above, at this time there were four or five distinct municipal authorities in Ekaterinoslav: the authority still professing to derive its power from Kerensky, the Ukrainians loyal to the Central Rada and its Secretariat, the authority comprised of certain more aligned citizens, the singular power of the sailors who had arrived in instalments from Kronstadt, and, en route, to do battle with Kaledin, had stopped to rest in Ekaterinoslav, and lastly the power of the Soviet of Peasant, Worker and Soldier Deputies, then headed by the syndicalist anarchist Grimbaum, a comrade of the utmost delicacy endowed with a steely determination, who was then, unfortunately, under the sway of the Bolshevik-Left SR power bloc. At this point the authority of the latter was preponderant, at least in the negotiations with the commanders of the "Ukrainian" military formations (the erstwhile Preobrazhensk, Pavlovski and Semenovski regiments which had been dispatched from Petrograd to Ekaterinoslav at this time) so much so that, but for his intervention, the Bolsheviks Kviring, Gopner and Enstein, plus the SR Popov and others would have been unable to achieve a thing and would have been driven out of Ekaterinoslav.

At the time, everything was dependent on the force of arms. Force of arms lay in the hands of the 'Ukrainianised' troops and of the divisions made up of the town's workers and inhabitants. Comrade Grimbaum managed to persuade the high command to side with the Soviet which, thanks to that, became strong enough to summon the Departmental Congress.

It is characteristic that, with the storm at its height, the Bolsheviks and left SRs receded into the background, pushing comrade Grimbaum into the foreground and where... once the storm had passed... he resumed command of events and assumed the leadership of the Departmental Congress.

Thus the Congress only got underway in the afternoon. The next day I took to the floor and presented a report from Gulyai-Polye. In passing, I pointed to the inconsistent action of Ukrainian chauvinists operating in the name of their departmental Selyanska Spilka and I listed to the Congress a series of regions in which the peasants did not at all recognise the policy of that Spilka.

Outraged at what I had said the chauvinists, seven of them, objected to the Congress saying that had been summoned on an unlawful basis, that the regions and communes should not have sent their representatives to it, and that only those representatives who had been selected by District Congresses should be considered as delegates. They demanded that the delegates from Gulyai-Polye be refused the right to speak and that they attend the proceedings as invited guests only.

The peasants' delegates, and Kviring and Enstein along with them, spoke out against any such demand, and the Congress rejected it.

Whereupon the chauvinists stood up with a flourish and left the hall. Their backers, the soldiers' delegates, also stood up and followed them out.

The Congress suspended its business for 3-4 hours. It was learned that the 'Ukrainian Departmental Revolutionary Rada' had held an impromptu meeting on the theme of whether 'to

dissolve the congress and take on the Soviet', a meeting at which the President of the 'Revolutionary Rada', Doctor Feldmann, had pointed out that they could not be sure of being the stronger and might well be beaten.

The Congress, worried by the idea that blood might flow in the streets of Ekaterinoslav at any moment, dispatched delegates to the barracks to the regiments to sound out their feelings. Comrade Grimbaum once again attacked the chauvinists and was backed up by the Ekaterinoslav Anarchist Federation. The anarchist sailors from Kronstadt backed the Congress delegates that day and spoke to the regiments and in the factories and workshops.

At the time, there was in Ekaterinoslav a regiment of the Knights of St George. It had always whistled down the Bolshevik speakers who had gone to see it.

Congress sent us, comrade L. Azensk and myself, to address the soldiers of that regiment and to get them to pass a resolution regarding the Ukrainian chauvinists who were trying to disrupt the Congress, and also to discuss with them a given number of essential points with an eye to concerted action.

I was in no hurry to be whistled down. I had often taken the floor during those nine months of Revolution and that had never happened to me. This time the Bolsheviks predicted to me that my turn had come: however, I was unwilling to shirk this mission. So off we went. A carriage bore us as far as the barracks, we strode into the regimental Committee and, having asked to see its chairman, handed him our credentials from the Congress.

He read these through and having kindly offered us a seat, went off to gather his men together for the meeting.

After 15 or 20 minutes, he returned, to announce to us that all his men had assembled. We were joined by two anarchist comrades at the door... Kronstadt sailors... and all four of us made towards the waiting soldiers.

At the meeting, we had a heated discussion with the officers, one of whom even wept and nipped off his epaulettes, and we got the regiment to pass a resolution in which it was stated that... 'the Knights of St George regiment would defend by force of arms, against any assault, the rights of the Departmental Congress of peasants and workers which had opened its business of December 2 of this year of 1917'.

Similar motions were also passed by the other regiments and detachments.

This outcome was unexpected, not so much by the Congress as by the Bolsheviks. All of the delegates were happy to have the armed forces on their side.

Congress resumed its business and completed it within three days.

It is interesting to note that all of the decisions taken there had already been put into effect in Gulyai-Polye three or four months earlier. Only one clause came as a novelty to us in that we had attributed little importance to it: the Right of the local soviets to a government subsidy. I have to point out that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs caught a lot of people out with this bait. But Gulyai-Polye could not countenance it, for its activities were above all anti-governmental and could not be dependent upon any of the central authorities, all of which had governmental ambitions.

## Chapter Four: The counter-revolution of the Central Rada.

After the closure of the Congress, the delegates made their way homewards.

Comrade Mironov and I went to the anarchist Federation so as to take some good propagandists back with us to the country. But the Federation, though in better circumstances than it had been last August when I had come to attend the peasants' and workers' Congress, was still not strong enough and could only manage to meet the needs of the town and the surrounding communes with difficulty. On the other hand it had arms in great store.. carbines, rifles, cartridges.

For the purpose of revolutionary order, the bloc authorities issued these without keeping a count. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, cognisant of the anarchists' commitment to the Revolution and knowing that none of them would defect to the camp of the Ukrainian chauvinists in cahoots with the antirevolutionary bourgeoisie, nor to the counter-revolutionary camp generally, always had recourse to the great enthusiasm of the Ekaterinoslav anarchists in times of danger.

The anarchist Federation issued us with several boxes of rifles and cartridges from its great store of weapons.

We ferried these back by train to Gulyai-Polye where we delivered a series of reports on the Congress and the difficulties it had encountered. Then we set about making the same reports in other hamlets and villages.

From that moment on, the denizens of the Gulyai-Polye region began determinedly to arm themselves and to look askance at their new 'revolutionary' masters. A picture of the resistance that might be offered by the new lordlings, the Bolsheviks and Left SRs, to the free development of peasant thinking and peasant action in the enslaved countryside came increasingly into focus, even among those of the toilers who were disposed to place their trust in the Bolsheviks and in the Left SRs.

Through their delegates the peasants and workers learned of the Bolshevik Enstein's having declared: 'The urban proletariat has come to power. It is to be expected that it will create a State of its own, a proletarian State. We Bolsheviks will devote all of our resources to helping it to create just such a State, for only thus will the proletariat be able to win maximum happiness.'

The toilers of Gulyai-Polye interpreted these words to mean that, jettisoning all scruples, the Bolshevik party would, at the peasants' expense, erect its own 'proletarian' State and they anxiously began to follow the course of events underway in the towns.

The peasants began to train in weapons-handling again in the villages.

'Our enemies, the authorities,' they used to say, 'are armed and if the idea should come to them to strip us of the right to live freely and to devise new social forms, they would attack us weapons in hand. As a result, we must know how to handle a rifle so as to reply to them, blow for blow if need be.'

And the peasants went on with their preparations.

Among the Gulyai-Polye peasants, there were some possessed of considerable military training. The young people used to go and train with them in the fields where they practised shooting, manoeuvres, etc.

Among those adept in the handling of weapons and always ready to lend a helping hand to the rest was Yakov Domachenko. He was the encouragement of young and old and he stayed with the peasants right to the very last day, taking part in the fighting and risking his neck. He was wounded several times, but held out to the end in the van of the revolution in this, the peasants' struggle for Bread and Freedom.

Events hotted up. News was reaching us every day. We learned that the Ukrainian Central Rada no longer got along with the Bolshevik Left SR bloc and that, with the popular masses trailing in its wake, it was engaging the bloc in open battle.

Agents from the Central Rada turned up by the dozen and more and more frequently in Gulyai-Polye and throughout the region, preaching a war without quarter against the Katzapi. Uneasily the populace sat up and took note. Representatives from the villages and hamlets of the region approached our anarchist-communist group's bureau, and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies Daily to seek advice concerning what it might be appropriate to do in an ongoing way to retain, undiluted, their rights over the land and to Bread and Freedom.

Gulyai-Polye's peasant anarchist group delegated two of its members to tour the region and brief the inhabitants of the anarchist view of the matter that was preoccupying them. At the same time it brought pressure to bear (through its members Makhno, Sokruta, Kalinichenko, Antonov, Sereguin and Knat) on the Soviet to urge its members to visit their respective wards so as to sound out local opinion to explain the progress of the Soviet's work and to make known what was to be done in the event of confirmation of the rumours announcing counter-revolution.

The mutual understanding and trust existing between the anarchist-communists and the toilers grew and became stronger and more pronounced.

In my capacity as representative of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet, invested by it with full powers, I dispatched two men to Odessa and to Kiev (regions where the Central Rada's armed forces were embroiled with those of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc).

On their return, informed as to what was afoot there, we convened a Congress of Soviets within the hour.

It took note of all the intelligence gathered concerning the battle joined between the Rada and the bloc and came to the conclusion that the Rada, for all that it was headed by SRs and SDs, had as its object in the struggle against the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, not merely the expulsion of the Katzapi from the 'Motherland Ukraine', but also the erasing of '...even the slightest vestiges of the Social Revolution'.

Congress passed the following resolution:

'Death to the Central Rada'.

This was unhesitatingly put into effect by the peasants and workers of the Gulyai-Polye region.

A few days after the end of the Congress and the delegates' return among them, the Soviet received from Aleksandrovsk a dispatch announcing that the Rada's forces were occupying the town so as to secure the Kichkas bridge for the passage of the Cossack troops being borne away from the front in the direction of the Don so as to join up with General Kaledin's army.

When this bulletin was broken to the toilers, it led to their adopting a unanimous stand.

From all parts, telephone messages and letters, generally very short, but steadfastly and clearly revolutionary, poured in for me, assuring me that the populace stood ready to take back into its own hands the command of the revolutionary front and expressing the desire to see the anarchist-communist group entrust me with preparing the peasants and place the cream of its organiser members at my disposal to assist me in this task.

The honest and absolute confidence displayed in me by the peasants—I say the peasants without mentioning the workers for in our Gulyai-Polye region the chief role in the Revolution was played by the peasants, whereas the mass of workers remained expectant—disturbed me, despite the sustained effort I made without stint or rest and which exhausted me without even sparing me the time to feel tiredness.

Indeed, their trust never ceased to worry me: I was afraid of being the cause of bloodshed. It was only a clear appreciation that the revolutionary endeavour has to be exempt from all this sentimentality, to which my comrades were prone, that bore me up and I rid myself of doubt.

For my own benefit and that of my comrades, I approached the issue in the following manner: if I am an advocate of anarchy, it would be absolutely criminal on my part to saddle myself, in my revolutionary activity, with a secondary role which would have me tripping along in the wake of other groups and parties often hostile to ours. An anarchist should, during the Revolution above all, stand in the van of the masses who struggle and try to wield enough sway over them to carry them, without curbing their energies, into Labour's true fight against Capital.

I remember having said at one of the group's sessions then:

It is time to put an end to meetings. The time has come to act. That remark is not applicable to us, but it is nonetheless useful that we too should think on it.

60%-70% of our comrades who nonetheless styled themselves anarchists, once having seized back the private homesteads of the pomeschiki, suspended all further propaganda among the peasants. Well now! They have taken the wrong road. From the bosom of their retreats, they cannot have any influence upon the course of events. It is sad to say, but true for all that!

It is crucial that our group escalate its activities among the peasants still further. The haidamaki<sup>1</sup> will be arriving endlessly in Gulyai-Polye. At the point of their bayonets these brutes carry the death of the Revolution and life for its enemies.

We should make up the vanguard in the struggle against these mercenaries of the counter-revolution and carry in our wake the entire labouring population of the region.

So, comrades, prepare yourselves, every one of you, some for local action, others to go to the Congress that our Soviet has urgently summoned for the day after tomorrow. We must become worthy of the trust which the toilers here show in us. And we can only do that by associating ourselves closely with their fight for freedom and independence.

The group knew precisely what it had to do in such a moment. Indefatigably, over several months, it had pressed on and induced the peasants to press on along this road. And I would never have dared broach the matter to it, had not the group itself sought my opinion of the matter.

Two days later, the peasants' delegates turned up for the Congress. I was proposed as its chairman, but I refused the nomination and delivered a report on behalf of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet and the anarchist-communist peasants' group. The Congress discussed all of the points in it and resolved to organise its meagre forces and to hold them ready to respond to the first

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<sup>1</sup> Troops in the service of the anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian governments during the Revolution.

summons that the Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies might issue to them to assemble in Gulyai-Polye itself or in any other place which might be indicated.

So we came to the end of the month of December 1917.

## Chapter Five: With the Leftist bloc against the counter-revolution.

On 31 December, for reasons of organisation, I found myself in the village of Pologi where I learned for certain that battle had been joined in Aleksandrovsk between a detachment of Red Guards from the Bogdanov group and some haidamakh units loyal to the Central Rada.

At such a time, to remain inactive was impossible, the more so since the populace was unmistakably hostile to the Rada whose agents roamed the region in pursuit of revolutionaries, labelling these as 'traitors to Mother Ukraine', and stalwarts of the Katzapi... who, to their way of thinking no doubt had to be exterminated as mortal enemies of the Ukrainian tongue.

Such charges offended the peasants who hurled any who voiced them off the rostrum and rained blows on the enemies of fraternal union with the Russian people.

This propaganda impelled the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region along the road of armed struggle against any Ukrainian separatist venture for people saw in chauvinism— the driving force behind Ukrainian separatism—the death of the Revolution.

While the haidamaki were fighting it out with the Red Guards in Aleksandrovsk, some Cossack echelons had mustered along a line through Alesandrovsk-Apostolovo-Krivoi Rog. They had come from the German front and were on their way to meet up with General Kaledin's army which was on the banks of the Don. Now the insurgency fomented by Kaledin was in reality a resuscitation of the old regime. On the pretext of safeguarding the independence of the Don, he rallied around his banner the darkling supporters of the reaction who aimed, with the Cossack's help, to have done with the Revolution and to restore the Romanov dynasty.

The interminable 2 January 1918 session of the Soviet of the Peasant and Worker Deputies of Gulyai-Polye, in which the metalworkers' and woodworkers' trade union participated, as did the anarchist-communist group, dragged on for 24 hours. It saw impassioned discussion of the steps urgently to be taken to prevent the Cossacks from reaching the Don, for their amalgamation with Kaledin's forces would have created a formidable counter-revolutionary front, representing, for all of the gains of the Revolution, a threat which we peasants could in no way countenance.

That protracted and dismal session inspired all involved in it with one and the same thought: as anarchists we had a duty, paradox or no, to make up our minds to form a united front with the government forces. Faithful to anarchist principles, we might surmount all contradictions and, once having annihilated the dark forces of reaction, we would broaden and deepen the flow of the Revolution for the greater good of an enslaved mankind.

I told them:

'It is vital that each one of us constantly have our intended aim before his eyes and tailor his reaction to this principle: one man ought not to be dominated by another—a principle that opens up our way to peace, freedom, equality and fellowship with the whole human race.'

We ought never to lose sight of it and that will enable us to remain loyal to the end to all that we have discussed and agreed here.'

Thus was resolved the problem of our action to come.

# **Chapter Six: The armed peasants rush to the aid of the urban workers. The Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and the Commission of Inquiry.**

On 3 January 1918, the commander of the Red Guard detachment, Bogdanov, addressed an appeal to the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye, seeking their assistance.

On the night of 3 January, our group issued the call to arms. That very night I handed over my post as chairman of the Soviet to one of my comrades and assumed command of an anarchist detachment made up of some hundreds of peasants who set off, in battle dress, in the direction of Aleksandrovsk.

I recall that, just before leaving Gulyai-Polye and on my prompting and in the presence of the crowd which had gathered, the detachment chose a commander. I was in fact obliged to decline this position, anticipating that I would not be able to occupy it on a permanent basis, since I would have to see to liaison between town and countryside.

So my brother Sava Makhno was elected in my place.

As we departed, the old people said to their sons who were in the ranks: 'You go to your death. We will not shrink from taking up your weapons and fighting for your beliefs of which we were ignorant a short time ago but which we now embrace. We will defend them unto death, if need be.

Do not forget that, dear sons!'

And these replied:

'God bless you for having raised us. We are strong now and we can fight and assert in life the principles of liberty and solidarity. We will be happy to see our fathers fight for our ideal. But meanwhile stay in your homes, follow our action from afar and should we fail out there, in the struggle against the Revolution's enemies, you will be victorious here—and forever.'

The leave-takings were moving.

Each of us knew the reason why he was setting off and where he was headed. The singing of a revolutionary anthem struck up as, one by one, the trucks taking us to the railway station moved off. Happy grins illuminated the faces of these young revolutionary peasants whom the followers of Marx treated as beasts of burden made solely for obedience. Yet there they were, self-conscious and conscious of their duty towards the Revolution, flying to the aid of the workers upon whom socialists of all hues had been exclusively depending for decades to seize power.

Cognisant of the risk they were running, these peasants nonetheless had no hesitation in making for the town. These were no posturing revolutionaries whose creed boiled down to speechifying—no! these were genuine militants, genuinely enamoured of the anarchist ideal. To

be sure, they might fail, might go astray, but without their honest attachment to the anarchist idea ever weakening.

There were 800–900 of them—and upwards of 300 of them were members of the anarchist group. As they made for the town, they knew that the workers were their brothers and that they became advocates of authority only when, snatched away from the mass of the toilers, they were subject to the influence of the politicians' ideas and actions.

Our detachment reached Aleksandrovsk without mishap. The town was calm. The Red Guards were consigned in their barracks. Some sentries patrolled the streets.

Only the authorities displayed a frantic activity. The Revolutionary Committee made up of Bolsheviks and Left SRs had, at the outset, tried to regiment the life of the workers. But it had been unable to succeed in this: the anarchist Federation barred its way, keeping the workers briefed about all of the activities of the municipal authorities, newly elected. So the Revolutionary Committee decided to concentrate upon setting up a front directed against reactionaries. To this end it asked the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation to send it two delegates.

The Federation appointed comrades Yasha and Nikiforova, the latter being promptly elected vice-president of the Revolutionary Committee.

That same day, the Committee asked us to send along a representative of our detachment. After some thought, and consultation with the Aleksandrovsk anarchists who had always been on our side, I was designated. This entry into the Committee was necessary by reason of events. A refusal to have any part of it might, we believed, compromise our whole theoretical and practical endeavour against the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.

After having sounded the opinion of the workers who had drawn our attention to the prisoners languishing in barred cells, we decided to send a representative to the Revolutionary Committee to secure their immediate release. In the event of a refusal, we would have gone and burst open the prison gates and put the building to the torch.

Then I was designated by our detachment to go along to the Revolutionary Committee which in turn delegated me, together with the Left SR Mingorodsky, the SR Mikhalevsky and others, to see to the release of the detainees. We went along to the prison, went inside, listened to the detainees' complaints, moved on to the Bureau and, following an exchange of views, went our separate ways. Indeed, our team was not complete. The main delegate, the Bolshevik, Lepic, was missing. Even at that stage he had been assigned, behind the scenes, to the chairmanship of the Cheka, though this was not admitted as yet.

I was familiar with that prison, having been twice an inmate, so I knew just how filthy and unbearable it was. It pained me to walk out of there without having freed the inmates. Nonetheless, I took it upon myself to draw up some criticisms addressed to Lepic and I left the prison precincts. I hailed a cab and had myself taken to the Revolutionary Committee.

We met together that same evening and decided to set to work without delay.

The prison was emptied a short time after that.

While retaining our old mandates, we were delegated...SR Mirgonodsky and me... by the Revolutionary Committee to the Commission of the Revolutionary front-line Tribunal attached to Bogdanov's Red Guards. That was the first armed unit to have come from the North to the Ukraine on the pretext of supporting the workers and peasants in their struggle against the reactionary measures of the Central Rada.

I was elected President of the Commission, and comrade Mirgorodsky was elected as secretary by the Red Guards from Petrograd (Vyborg district). The Commission comprised of seven

members. The chancery of the Red Guards command made a stack of records available to us. These were the dossiers of all who were being held in the Stolypin-type 'prison wagons'.

We were asked to look them over and to record our conclusions. But comrade Mirgorodsky and I objected to this way of going about things. Those members of the Commission who had come from Petrograd endorsed our view, without siding with us, however.

We declared that in all conscience we could not examine these dossiers except in the presence of the accused, they alone being in a position to explain to us the circumstances of their arrest, etc.

This Commission of inquiry, as one might call the revolutionary front-line Tribunal (Commander Bogdanov, moreover, so regarded it) kept me busy for more than three days. I worked frantically at it, taking time off neither to eat nor to sleep. The prisoners were very numerous and of all ranks: generals, colonels, subordinate officers, militia chiefs and ordinary privates from the haidamakh units. They had this much in common... that they were all, or nearly all, avowed enemies of the October Revolution and of any revolution generally and, as a result, they knew what they had been doing.

But they were, for the most part, innocent of the crime with which they were charged. The bulk of them who had been arrested, unarmed, at their homes had no intention of fighting against the Revolution and that we may state with confidence. They had been denounced by rogues who, in order to cover up their own odious counter-revolutionary past had become even more hateful when the Revolution came along by doing a somersault and hypocritically upholding it by turning informer against all who, by virtue of their social rank, had hitherto been outside of the revolutionary movement, but who had nonetheless not hindered its growth.

Now, the Red Guard commanders readily listened to such people, hoping thereby to safeguard their own positions the better.

Thus, in the midst of the Revolution, the cowardice of some linked hands with the zeal of others and that because those who had full powers proved incapable of perceiving the truthfulness of some and the duplicity of others.

The Commission which I headed scrutinised more than 200 dossiers and delivered its findings on each one. In many instances, acknowledging the actively antirevolutionary role played by the accused, it forwarded the dossiers to Bogdanov's staff who dispatched them to Antonov-Ovseenko's headquarters in Kharkov—which meant, in Bolshevik language, that they were to be shot.

Among the detainees questioned, almost all of those acknowledged as culpable showed themselves to be weak and cowardly. With death looming imminent before them, they resorted to the most sordid methods in an attempt to save their skins. Generals were seen to weep. By contrast, some of the colonels professed regret at having been arrested: they claimed that, had the revolutionaries not captured them, they would have been able to rally a sufficient number of volunteers to support General Kaledin and to restore the monarchy. As they were being escorted from the carriage-room where the Commission was in session, they shouted: 'Long live the house of Romanov! Long live the emperor Nicholas Aleksandrovich, lord of all the Russias! May he crush the Revolution!'

It is true that such cases were rare and that only two colonels turned out to be loyal to monarchist and aristocratic principles.

Among the enormous number of accused, one above all has lingered in my memory: he was an army district commander arrested for having, acting on orders from his superiors, mobilised

young conscripts at a time when the Ukrainian Central Rada was experiencing a short-lived victory.

There was no conclusive evidence that he was an enemy of the Revolution. Nonetheless, opinions were divided. Four members of the Commission saw him as a devout and active counter-revolutionary. The other three took a contrary view. It was clear that the district commander was going to be shot. The argument turned stormy. Comrade Mirgorodsky, a Left SR, then suggested to me that we quit the Commission and go back to the Revolutionary Committee.

‘Let it send others in our place,’ he said.

Our Petrograd comrades poked fun at us, arguing that we were not conducting ourselves as revolutionaries. And it was only afterwards that we showed them what it was to act as revolutionaries, and all four backed down from demanding the death penalty and the district commander was acquitted.

Here is another, more characteristic instance: during the scrutiny of the dossiers from Bogdanov’s staff, the Red Guards delivered new prisoners: Commissar Mikhno of the Kerensky government (the man who, 4 or 5 months earlier, had denounced me to the courts for having disarmed the bourgeoisie of Gulai-Polye), militia commander Vassiliev, the prosecutor-general Maximov and Piotr Sharovsky. The latter, a member of our group in Gulai-Polye in 1910 had, around that time, betrayed our comrades Aleksandr Semenyuta and Marfa Pivel to the police and received, in payment for that craven action, 500 out of the 2000 roubles promised by General Security to whomsoever would hand over A. Semenyuta.

My meeting with this erstwhile ‘comrade’ was as depressing as can be. He threw himself on to his knees before me, lifting up his arms and beseeching me: ‘Save me, Nestor Ivanovich. My treachery was involuntary. I talked to a civilian, not realising that he was a Security agent.’

I might have been taken in by his words, had I not had very specific information during my days of hard labour, and had not this information been confirmed to me upon my return to Gulai-Polye by Marfa Pivel who had witnessed the arrest and death of A. Semenyuta. A bullet had lodged in her temple during the episode and, despite her serious wound, serious but happily not fatal... had been arrested.

Sharovsky’s own brothers, Prokop and Grigor, had helped me in 1917 to establish the proof of his act of provocation. Shortly after the death of A. Semenyuta, one of them had participated in the assassination bid by our comrade ‘the Japanese’ on P. Sharovsky. Two shots were fired at him but unfortunately failed to bring him down, for the police came to his aid and found him a haven. Once having recovered from his wounds, he sealed all of the windows of his house, leaving open only the top portion of the casement windows. He fled when I returned to Gulai-Polye.

I spotted him afterwards in Aleksandrovsk moving from one group of workers to another, with a basket on his arm.

When he sighted me, he went to ground.

I then used my influence with the Red Guard commander Bogdanov, asking him to intercede with the revolutionary authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc to have P. Sharovsky arrested.

Immediately, he dispatched two squads of Red Guards to the spot where I have sighted this individual and they arrested him.

On 6 January 1918, I delivered a detailed report to the Commission of Inquiry (of which I was president) establishing the identity of P. Sharovsky and relating how he had betrayed A. Semenota and how much he had been paid for that service.

I then stated that the report was addressed, not to the members of the Commission, but to the SRs and Bolsheviks, so as to bear witness to the guilt of P. Sharovsky and to legitimise the verdict. The Bolshevik members from Petrograd proposed to hand over Sharovsky to commander Bogdanov, but neither I nor the Left SR Mingorodsky would countenance that and we asked the commander to lodge him in a wagon until such a time as I had wound up some outstanding business. At this point, some other comrades from our group turned up... Filip Krat, Sava Makhno, and Pavel Korostelev... and with them, some members of the Aleksandrovsk anarchist group. We then subjected Sharovsky to an interrogation, after which one of the comrades put a bullet in his head.

No less distasteful for me was my encounter with erstwhile commissar Mikhno. I had a vague idea how hard it would be for me to establish his wrongdoing vis à vis the revolutionary peasants and workers. On an order bearing his signature as commissar of the Coalition Government, I had been indicted before the courts on revolutionary acts committed by the Committee for Defence of the Revolution in the Gulai-Polye region.

He had demanded of the communal Committee that it ban me from all social activity. Even so, upon receipt of the letter in which I protested in the name of the regional congress of the peasants of Gulai-Polye, he rescinded his decision. I sensed that it would be hard for me to be impartial towards him and I was afraid lest this be damaging towards him... Who had, in tsarist times, been a rather upstanding liberal.

On the other hand, I was firmly convinced that it was hard to accept the killing of a man for the sole reason that he had participated in the coalition government in the capacity of commissar and done his duty as such. Our region had never adhered to his ordinances, which in any case he had not had the power to enforce when the toilers triumphed.

Then the Commission took it upon itself to subject him to the closest questioning reminding him of his attacks, as government agent, on our Committee for Defence of the Revolution and on myself, and set him free.

Quite different was our attitude towards the prosecutor Maximov and the local militia boss Vassiliev.

This pair who represented, in one instance the Tsarist courts and in the other the Coalition Government's police, were acknowledged on the basis of the available evidence, as enemies of the Revolution. On the decision of the commission, both were handed over to Bogdanov's staff.

Those two decisions came to the attention of the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee, then headed by the Bolshevik Mikailovich, the anarchist Maria Nikiforova and several other influential anarchists. This Committee, which had been hastily set up, feared for its very life and tried to play up to those of the bourgeois who had not fled and who, of course, secretly gave their support to prosecutor Maximov and the district police chief Vassiliev.

The chairman arrived hotfoot from the town, together with almost all his committee members and approached our commission, which was then based at commander Bogdanov's headquarters at the Southern railway station to protest at the decision we had reached with regard to the cases of the prosecutor and the militia boss.

It was with the same intent that Maria Nikiforova arrived in Gulai-Polye in the company of some Bolshevik members of the district's Revolutionary Committee and a veritable delegation of Right SRs.

Our Commission grew angry.

According to the documents which Bogdanov's staff had passed on to us, and which had been amassed by dyed-in-the-wool Bolsheviks, it transpired that prosecutor Maximov, in the tsar's day as well as under the coalition of SRs and SDs with the bourgeoisie, had always been a ferocious enemy of the toilers and of their aspirations to freedom. His crime with regard to the Revolution was patently obvious. The documents proved that, among the bourgeois of Aleksandrovsk he had formed a counter-revolutionary Action Committee. But he was an industrial, intelligent sort and, we later discovered, the Bolsheviks intended to recruit him; moreover, they succeeded in this some time afterwards.

When the Red Guards entered Aleksandrovsk, Vassiliev for his part sided with the haidamaki; posted on the roof of his house, he had opened up with a machine-gun on the attackers. He killed and wounded a large number of them. What is more, the town's and district's militia boss, he knew that prisoners were being beaten and had turned a blind eye to it.

It was on the basis of these facts that the Commission had declared Maximov and Vassiliev to be enemies of the Revolution and of the people. By virtue of this finding, they were to have been removed to the staff of the revolutionary army whose commander might have them shot or set free, for the Commission's decisions were not binding upon Bogdanov, the chief of staff. Even so, he generally took our findings into account, promptly released those whom we deemed innocent and shooting the guilty ones.

After having noted the objection by the Revolutionary Committee and received the SR delegation, the Commission asked Bogdanov's staff to return its findings in the case of Maximov and Vassiliev and formally announced that it had decided to retain these two guilty men in its custody, having, it said, come into possession of fresh documents.

The SR comrade Mingorodsky and I went in search of Bogdanov and obtained from him an undertaking that their lives would be spared until such time as the difference which had arisen between the Commission and the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee would be resolved.

I reported this outcome to the delegation: after which we began, along with the members of the Revolutionary Committee, a discussion that was stormy. Mikhailevich and Maria Nikiforova asked commandant Bogdanov to participate in it. The latter did come along and shared the views of the Commission. The tone became more shrill. The Commission had delivered to Bogdanov's staff the decision in writing to remove the prosecutor and militia boss to a special wagon and to keep them there under close surveillance until it might send for them.

The discussion dragged on for more than six hours. By the end, all of the members of the Revolutionary Committee seemed to approve of our decision, but they pointed out that it failed to take account of the dire circumstances and that it might very well be necessary to have the town of Aleksandrovsk evacuated at any day: for the Don and Kuban Cossacks, abandoning the external front, were following all railroad lines towards the Don in order to rejoin General Kaledin's troops.

Indeed around him were rallying all of the dark forces of counter-revolution and its accomplices: rural small holders, merchants, manufacturers—rampant parasites who were trying, at the expense of the Cossacks (whose womenfolk, children and aged parents were going to be killed and their stanitzi<sup>1</sup> laid waste) to construct an antirevolutionary front to leap to the defence of the tsar and of their own privileges.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanitza = a Cossack village (Translator's note).

The Revolutionary Committee members spared no effort to try to get the Commission to acknowledge that its decision in the case of Maximov and Vassiliev risked their being executed by commander Bogdanov, the upshot of which would have been that the Committee would lose its prestige as a local revolutionary authority and thereby be prevented, in the event of the town's being abandoned, from reoccupying it afresh, etc.

If I had taken upon myself the thankless role of a member of the Commission of inquiry it was, on the one hand, in order to inform myself and to enlighten the peasants as to the preoccupations of the statist-socialists, with the manner in which, in these grandiose days of revolutionary upheaval, these 'champions of the ideal of justice and equality' were throwing their principles overboard and thought only of the privileges of authority, and, on the other hand, in order to gain a measure of experience in the line to adopt in events of that calibre.

I regarded myself as a militant who had come in from the countryside with the revolutionary peasants for the sole purpose of helping the workers to fight the bands of haidamaki in the pay of the bourgeois and to disarm the Cossacks.

The line of argument pursued by the Bolshevik members of the Revolutionary Committee, the Left Social Revolutionaries and the anarchist Nikiforova struck me as criminal. I said as much to them in no uncertain terms. The SR Mirgorodsky, three Bolshevik comrades from the Petrograd Red Guards (Vyborg district) who were on our Commission, and commandant Bogdanov himself seconded me.

Day was beginning to break. We were all spent. The members of the Revolutionary Committee were palpably hostile to me but did not decide to recall me. The jesuitry which even then impregnated the politics of the greater part of the Bolsheviks and of the Left SRs trailing in their wake, would not let them do so. But they intended to prolong the detention of the prosecutor and militia boss so as, on the one hand, to save them and, on the other, to compromise me in the eyes of the thousands of revolutionary peasants from the proud and loyal Gulai-Polye region. Then they proposed a resolution which 'returned prosecutor Maximov and militia boss Vassiliev to the Revolutionary Committee charged with compilation of more extensive dossier and with scrutiny of the same.'

This hypocritical motion left us beside ourselves, and we resolved to submit the affair to a review in which we would participate. Our decision, following some objections from the Revolutionary Committee, was eventually adopted.

At this point we were tipped off that around twenty echelons of Cossacks were making for Aleksandrovsk, coming from Apostolovo via Nikopol, intending to force a way through to the Don and to join up with Kaledin's army.

When this news was announced, for all that we had been divided all night by the discussion we had held, we agreed upon the rapid transfer of the prosecutor and militia boss to Aleksandrovsk prison, where they were placed in cell no. 6 (in the tsar's day I myself had spent upwards of a year in that very cell. The prosecutor, to whom I complained at the time about the filthy conditions there, about the countless lice and lack of ventilation had replied with a ferocious grin: 'Need a little more air?' Then I overheard him outside in the corridor as he ordered that I be placed in the solitary cell for fifteen days).

So they were locked up there on their own, on the very conditions which they themselves had imposed upon the inmates, namely: one monthly visit from relations, one fortnightly change of linen and a bath, a ban on coming up close to the window and looking out into the courtyard, etc.

Then we split up, each resuming his position: then, having proceeded to kit out our troops we crossed via the Kichkas bridge on to the right bank of the Dniepr to form up a combat line.

## **Chapter Seven: The armed struggle against the Cossacks. Delegation, disarmament of the Cossacks and an understanding with them.**

It was 8 January 1918. It was cold. Towards evening a fine snow began to fall, heralding the thaw. Our combat units assumed their positions and dug trenches. By telephone we came to agreement with the Cossack leaders and persuaded them to appoint some delegates who were to meet with our own midway between the Kichkas and Khortiz stations so as to establish clearly the wishes of both parties.

Our delegation was made up of two commanders from the Bogdanov group, of comrade Boborykin of the sailors' detachment, of Maria Nikiforova of the Aleksandrovsk anarchists' detachment and of myself, representing the revolutionary peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region and the anarchist communist group.

Around 8.00 pm., a locomotive ferried us to the agreed spot. Another locomotive and one carriage bearing the Cossacks' delegation arrived at the same time. The latter delegation comprised, in addition to some officers, of some Cossacks from the ranks. But the latter said not a word and remained tight-lipped. Only the officers spoke: with pride, with haughtiness, sometimes even proffering insults, especially when one of our delegates, comrade Boborykin informed them that we would not allow them to pass, armed, through Aleksandrovsk, in their march towards the Don.

We spent a good hour trying to convince one another and this might have been there yet had not the Cossacks told us bluntly that they did not need to seek our permission to cross the Kichkas bridge and pass through the town of Aleksandrovsk.

'We represent,' one of the delegates told us, '18 echelons of Cossacks from the Don and from Kuban-Labinsk and 6 or 7 echelons of haidamaki of the Ukrainian Central Rada,' (who, they claimed, had set out from Odessa and joined up with them, en route, in order to accompany them as far as the left bank of the Dniepr and there to wage a campaign against the Katzapi).

To this announcement, which was accompanied by foul language, our delegate replied:

'If such be the case, we will take our leave of you. Our talks are at an end. We, representing the peasants, workers and sailors espouse in your attitude the desire to provoke a bloody and fratricidal conflict. Come then! We will await you!'

Right there and then we stormed out of their carriage and our locomotive ferried us back to our own side.

The Cossack delegation returned to its. (?)

Arriving at our advance lines, we informed the fighters that our negotiations had proved fruitless, that an attack was to be expected at any moment and that, as a result, reconnaissance in advance of each position and right along the front line had to be stepped up.

Along with some of our fighters we then journeyed to about one kilometre from our front lines and we unbolted the tracks in two places: by around 1.00 am., we were all back and, in the grip of great excitement, awaited the Cossacks' attack.

The night was pitch black. The snow that had been falling since morning turned to rain.

It was 2.00 am.. It was raining more and more heavily. However there was no sign of the enemy who had probably decided to await the first light of day. Some of the fighters, stretched out in the trenches they had just dug, were chatting among themselves. But the old hands at soldiering, especially the ones from Gulyai-Polye, told them:

'Be on the lookout, comrades, these Cossacks will try to avail of this foul weather to outflank our positions and seize the Kichkas bridge and Aleksandrovsk.'

Several began to laugh. But their laughter soon died: for shortly after 2.00 am. we were alerted to the fact that tapping on the railway tracks could be heard. It was the forward patrol of Cossacks which had just reached the spot where we had unbolted the tracks. Indeed it was following the tracks, inspecting their condition.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, we made out the noise of a locomotive:

'Here they come!' we heard it whispered in the ranks.

'Quiet!' other voices whispered.

Nerves were on edge. A shudder.

'What a lousy thing war is,' the fighters told one another.

Then I came to squat down beside two of them, and, taking up their idea, I told them:

'Yes, my friends, war is a very lousy business. We all feel that way, but we cannot shirk it.'

'And how come, why do you say that, Nestor Ivanovich?' they insisted.

'As long as the enemies of our freedom,' I went on, 'have recourse to arms, we too will be obliged to reply to them with weapons in hand. Right now we can see that they insist upon fighting us and yet they know very well that the toilers do not want to be wage slaves any longer, but want instead to be free, beyond the reach of all slavery. One would have thought that that should have been enough.'

Our enemies, the pomeschiki, the owners of the factories and workshops, the generals, functionaries, merchants, priests, jailers and the whole crew of police paid to protect these stalwarts of the tsarist regime as well, should have understood and not stood in the way of the toilers who are trying to complete their task of revolutionary liberation.

Now, not only do they not want to understand that, but indeed they try to win over to their side a number of statist-socialists and, in concert with those traitors, they devise new forms of authority to prevent us from gaining our rights to a free and independent life.

All of these drones produce nothing of what they need, but strive to have everything without doing anything and strive to run everything, including the lives of the toilers and always—this is typical—at the expense of the masses. And consequently, it is they who bear the responsibility for this war, and not we. Right now all we are doing is defending ourselves, but that, friends, is not enough. We must not only look to our defences but go on to the offensive in our turn: for self-defence would have been enough if, having overthrown the power of capital and the State, we were living amid plenty and freedom, if the abolished slavery had been replaced by equality and had our enemies not then turned on us with the aim of crushing us and enslaving us once more. But at a time when as yet all we are doing is striving after that goal, we must think about going on to the attack ourselves.

Defence is closely connected with it, to be sure, but that must be the concern of those of our brothers and sisters who, while not in the front lines of the Revolution, merely follow on behind the fighters and, taking up their ideas, spread and intensify the Revolution, which you mistakenly call war.

In which case, the business of defence takes on its true character and justifies all of the blood spilled by the fighters in the course of the destructive phase of the Revolution; for they consolidate their gains without warping either the character or the import of them.'

Just then an order was boomed out: 'Machine-gunner section—Fire!' It was addressed to a detachment of 16–18 machine-guns posted at a bend in the railway line, just behind the lines so as to confront the Cossack echelons at the right time. I disapproved of such waste, but in those days the Red Guard troops, equipped with 3 or 4 times as many machine-guns as they needed, were profligate with them, as evidenced by the manner in which they had set these ones up well beyond the front lines.

When the shooting began, I saw hundreds of fighters who had drawn closer to listen to me, scramble back to their respective positions at a run.

The machine-guns of our side drew violent fire in reply from the enemy. The crack of weapons spread right along our front and illuminated it from end to end. The enemy ceased firing. We also ceased firing.

At that moment I felt profound sadness, which my companions shared. They remembered the cruelty with which the Cossacks had, in 1905–1906, crushed the ventures of toilers who had dared proclaim their demands freely to the *skhods-assemblies*.

If we peasants had not seen things with our very own eyes, we had at least, each one of us, heard tell of them. And this injected fresh courage into the fighters; it incited them to scorn the risk of death, to confront with even more determination these creatures who, in other circumstances were as we were, as all men were, capable of good and evil but who, at present, marched swollen with pride, obedient to their outmoded ideas and led by their generals and officers. These men, abused it is true, were armed, forging a passage through revolutionary territory, a passage towards the 'White' Don, towards General Kaledin, in order to rally to the reaction and to see it triumph over the Revolution which had already cost the toilers so dear. These men were our enemies, ready to lash us with their *nagaiki*<sup>1</sup>, to beat us with rifle buts, to do us to death.

Among our troops, shouts went up, of 'Let's attack! They must be prevented from dismounting from the carriages!'

But soon the Cossacks were once again advancing towards our lines and they opened fire. The retort from our side was so violent and the shooting so accurate that their convoy retreated at all speed, loosing off only a few rifle reports or isolated machine-gun bursts in reply.

In Khortiz railway station the Cossack's commanders had stationed a series of supporting echelons which they had sent out in the wake of the first convoy. It transpired that the train which was retreating at speed collided with one of the ones coming in the opposite direction, derailed it and itself left the tracks. The impact was so severe that many carriages were demolished and their occupants—and horses—killed.

It was this that forced the Cossack command to pull the echelons of troops which had remained in Khoritz Station back towards Nikopol and to send us a 40 man delegation comprised, for the most part, of ordinary troopers, to engage us in talks.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nagaika* = a leather crop used by Cossacks (Translator's note).

The delegation, with a white flag at its head, arrived at precisely 3.00 pm., on 8 January 1918. Greeted by irrepressible joy, it was escorted to the sector command, bombarded with questions as to the proposals it brought. It informed us that the Cossack troops were succeeded by several echelons of haidamaki who dreamed of occupying the town of Aleksandrovsk, with the aid of the Don and Kuban Cossacks, and of making sorties from there into the villages and countryside to wipe out the Katzapì and the unconverted Jews who were preventing them from unfurling over the 'Ukrainian Sea' the yellow and blue standard of pogroms and the slaughter of unbelievers.

'But after the failure of our attack yesterday,' the delegation told us, 'after the derailing of the convoys and a comparative assessment of our strength and that of the populace supporting you in this region, the haidamaki have pulled back in the direction of the Nikopol-Apostolovo railway station.'

'As far as we are concerned,' these Cossacks went on, 'we have decided not to follow them, but to enter into talks with you with a view to securing free passage across the territories occupied by you.'

For that reason we agree to lay down our weapons, but leave us our horses, our saddles and, if possible, our sabres.'

Our staff found these conditions unacceptable, understanding perfectly that a saddled mount and a sabre represented the essential equipment of a Cossack whether for a march or for an engagement with the enemy, especially if that enemy turned out to be, as the Revolution's troops were most of the time, an untrained army, a raw and unrefined material.

In the end, the Cossack delegation gave up on the sabres but steadfastly insisted upon retaining the horses and saddles, arguing on the basis of the tradition which forbade the Cossack to reappear either for active service or at his home without his horse and saddle. And our command, in the light of a host of tactical and other considerations, was induced to yield on this point.

Following agreement, one part of the Cossack delegation remained behind with us.

Learning that the Don and Kuban Cossacks had agreed to lay down their arms against the revolutionary front, those Ukrainian haidamaki troops who were retreating along the Nikopol-Apostolov line swung away from Apostolovo towards the Verkhovtsévo-Verkhne-Dneprovsk sector.

Over a two and a half period, the Cossack forces, divided into 18 echelons, were disarmed and they were escorted to Aleksandrovsk where they were revictualled and where an ongoing series of meetings was organised for their benefit. At those meetings, the Bolshevik-left SR bloc strove to recruit them to their way of thinking and exposed them to their finest orators. The latter, revolutionary in the extreme when it came to speechifying, claimed to be: '.. unalterably committed to the work of the Revolution and to its objectives: the effective emancipation of labour, the abolition of the yoke of Capital and the police State.' These charlatans promised the Cossacks complete unmitigated freedom, considerable autonomy for the Don region and other provinces which, under Romanov rule, had been enslaved by every means and which made up the 'one and indivisible' Russia, the 'Holy' Russia of thieves and rogues.

Some of them declaimed pretty words about the national rebirth of each of these enslaved provinces and that unashamedly and despite the presence at these meetings of adversaries who were perfectly well aware that all of these fine words were at odds with the actions of their leaders and that in ventilating them they were lying in the most brazen fashion.

However, the Cossacks generally remained unimpressed, paying little heed to the speeches and laughing now and then.

Then the anarchists took the floor, especially Maria Nikiforova who declared to the Cossacks that they, the anarchists, promised nothing to anyone, that all they wanted was that men should learn to know themselves, to understand their circumstances under the prevailing regime of slavery and finally that they wanted to see them win their freedom for themselves.

‘But, before speaking to you of all this in greater detail, I am obliged to tell you, Cossacks, that hitherto you have been the executioners of the toilers of Russia. Are you going to remain such in the future, or will you at last come to grasp your despicable role and return to the family of toilers which thus far you have refused to acknowledge and which, for a rouble from the tsar or for a glass of wine, you were always ready to crucify alive?’

At that point the Cossacks, several thousand of whom were present there, doffed their papakhi<sup>2</sup> and hung their heads.

Maria Nikiforova went on speaking. Many of the Cossacks were sobbing like children. And lots of intellectuals who had made their way there from Aleksandrovsk and were standing near the rostrum turned to one another and said:

‘My God, how insipid and pitiful the speeches of the Revolutionary Committee’s and the political parties’ representatives seem alongside the speeches of the anarchists and especially Maria Nikiforova’s!’

It cheered us to hear such words from the mouths of those who had, for years past, always given us wide berth.

But it was not for that reason that we told the Cossacks the truth. We merely wanted them to understand the truth so that, drawing their inspiration from it, they might shrug off those who had kept them in check and in whose service they had... since the far-off days when they had first settled on the Don and Donetz, on the Kuban and on the Terek, ... became the bane of every free initiative on the part of the toilers. Yes, the Cossacks had ever been the executioners of the toilers. Many of them had already realised that, but others went on cravenly deploying their sabres and their nagaiki against the enslaved masses.

For the whole of their sojourn in Aleksandrovsk (they spent a further five days there after the meeting) they arrived daily in a crowd at the Federation’s Office seeking further details from the anarchists and answering the questions that the latter put to them. Contacts were established. Some of them left their addresses so that they might receive anarchist publications and that correspondence might be exchanged regarding issues related to the Social Revolution.

The Kuban Cossacks, especially the ones from the Labinsky unit, were among those who displayed the greatest interest, and I know that several of them maintained a long-lived correspondence with our anarchists, seeking explanations from them of this or that question of social organisation, requesting that new publications be sent them and sending money insofar as they were able.

The Don Cossacks too put such requests to us, but never in such great numbers nor with so much interest. This, on the one hand, because they were less advanced and, on the other, because the reaction had erected on their territory a pyre upon which it aimed to sacrifice the Revolution.

While the disarmed Cossacks were in Aleksandrovsk, the revolutionary command suggested to them that they take the side of the Revolution against General Kaledin.

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<sup>2</sup> Papakha = high Astrakhan bonnet (Translator’s note).

Many of them agreed to this and declared their readiness to take up arms and set out for the front. They were formed up into Sotnia and they were dispatched to Kharkov where they were placed at the disposal of General Antonov-Ovseenko commanding the armies of South Russia.

Others on the other hand stated a wish to see their children and relations again, it being four years since they had laid eyes on them, and they asked to be allowed to go home. The revolutionary command so authorised them. But in point of fact it dispatched them to Kharkov where it had their mounts confiscated.

I do not wish at all to pass judgement upon this move by the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, for to have allowed saddled horses to pass just then into the zone whence military attacks against the Revolution were originating would have been tantamount to an act of treachery. By agreement with my friends, I reproached the Bolsheviks and Left SRs with just one thing: that from the outset of the negotiations with the Cossacks they had acted, not as revolutionaries but as Jesuits, making promises and failing to honour them. In so doing they might have done the Revolution a lot of damage. And indeed that damage was done: the posting of armoured cars outside the premises where anarchists gathered, the monitoring of revolutionary organisations in the towns and villages already heralded the misdeeds of the two parties which ruled the country and which were revolutionary in name only.

## **Chapter Eight: The Bolshevik-Left SR bloc in Aleksandrovsk. My observations and the consequences of them.**

The front established for the purpose of arresting the Cossack's advance as they made their way towards the Zaporozhe was dismantled. Nothing more was heard of them on that flank. All revolutionary detachments were switched from the right bank of the Dniepr to the left bank, to Aleksandrovsk and to the surrounding villages.

Given that the aim of Bogdanov's staff was to proceed with their march towards the Crimea and that the town of Aleksandrovsk was thus left defenceless, its inhabitants were forced to look to their own organisation, and the workers set about doing precisely that.

At the prompting of the parties represented on it, the Revolutionary Committee too began to display some revolutionary activity. This first took the form of an unwarranted interference in the local life of the toilers, in the shape of stringent, authoritarian orders communicated by word of mouth or put down in writing.

It also grew bold in matters concerning the town: it levied 18 million roubles from the Aleksandrovsk bourgeoisie. There were fresh arrests, as in the days of the Coalition Government and the Rada, and of course the first ones to suffer by these were the right wing socialists. (As yet they did not venture to lay a finger on anarchists on account of the influence of the latter in the Gulyai-Polye and Kamyshevat regions). On the Committee itself, there were no more references to the 'prison commissar'; in fact the prison had long occupied one of the most important places in the 'Socialist' organisation of life.

I had more than once been seized by an urge to blow it up, but I had not been able to lay my hands on a sufficient supply of dynamite or pyroxylyne. I had mentioned this to the left SR Mirgorodsky and to Maria Nikiforova, but both of them, aghast, tried to overload me with work so as to prevent my contacting the Red Guards whose stocks of explosives were considerable.

I accepted the work with which the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee burdened me, and saw it through.

But it is not in my nature to let myself be led by the nose while knowing that God knows what is afoot behind my back—the more so in that I was no novice in revolutionary action. Thus I was incapable of working for the sole purpose of being approved by the 'all-knowing' and 'all-powerful' ones of the present moment.

I saw clearly and with assurance that collaboration with the Bolsheviks and Left SRs was becoming impossible for an anarchist, even collaboration in the campaign to defend the Revolution.

Moreover, the revolutionary spirit of the Bolsheviks-Left SRs was beginning to alter visibly: they sought only to lay hands on the Revolution, to reign, in the crudest sense of the word.

Having long observed them at work in Aleksandrovsk, and earlier at the departmental and district congresses of the peasants and workers, where they had a majority at that point, I sensed

that the cohesion of those two parties was a fiction, and that, sooner or later, one of them would have to absorb or brutally gobble up the other, since both supported the principle of the State and its authority over the free community of toilers.

It is true that those toilers, the active factor in the Revolution, failed to grasp this in time. They had such trust in all revolutionaries that they scarcely bothered to go through their ideas with a fine-tooth comb or to monitor their activities. On every occasion one had to attract their attention and explain to them what it was all about. Who was there to do this, if not the anarchists? What connections had they, though, with the mass of toilers at that point in the Russian Revolution?

The vast majority of those who sought to direct this movement were then, if not compliant towards the central authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR-bloc, then at any rate extraneous to direct action and thereby on the fringes of the Revolution.

This was true of the most prominent anarchist-syndicalists and anarchist-communists (I say nothing of the individualist anarchists who were nonexistent either in Russia or, above all, in the Ukraine).

True, at their own risk and peril, some anarchist groups of peasants and workers did often make belated decisions, and hurled themselves into every front line in the tempest of revolution where they gave of themselves honestly with a burning love for the Revolution and for their ideal. But alas! They perished prematurely and without much benefit to our cause.

How could this have been so? Personally, I have but one answer to offer: 'Not being organised, the anarchists lacked unity of action.' The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, by contrast, capitalised at this time upon the workers' trust in the Revolution, by methodically pursuing their party interests instead of the interests of the toilers.

In another time, in different conditions and different circumstances, they would not have dared to substitute for the common revolutionary endeavour the political recipes of their central committees. But they realised that, in the present context, there was no one around to expose them: the right-wing socialists were then kept in tow by the bourgeoisie and the anarchists alone were left to direct the toilers' strength against these machinations.

But once again we anarchists did not have organised personnel, au fait with the issues and problems of the day, to call upon.

The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, under the guidance of the quick-witted Lenin, noted the powerlessness of our movement and rejoiced at it: for the sight of us incapable of pitting the handiwork of the entire toiling populace against their party political interests heartened the statist. They courted the masses more boldly and playing up to them with the slogan of 'All power to the local Soviets' they established, at the masses' expense, their own political power as a statist party, making this preeminent over everything in the revolutionary endeavour, beginning with the toilers who had but recently broken their shackles but who had yet to achieve complete emancipation.

Through their collaboration with the bourgeoisie at a time when all the toilers were opposed to it, the Right SRs and the Menshevik SDs contributed to the success of the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. At that time, the toilers had not yet repudiated the Right SRs. They were content to broaden the latter's programmes to share the burden of comradeship with the bourgeoisie, and the burden of the acknowledgement of the lawful powers of the Constituent Assembly etc., strove to carry them with them into this collusion.

All such notions peddled by the Right SRs were of themselves unacceptable to the masses. What is more, by this time they were operating openly against the Revolution. The upshot of all this was in the end the toilers opted instead for the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs.

This eventuality, tragic as far as the Revolution was concerned, was familiar to every revolutionary anarchist who, in his direct endeavour, had worked in close conjunction with the peasants and workers and had shared with them the successes and failures of their concerted actions.

Thus, uneasy to see that the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc was not the rallying point that would have been needed at a time when Labour was taking on Capital and governmental Power in an engagement that would be decisive for all who had unselfishly given of their energy and of their lives so as to prepare for and to hasten it, I became more and more profoundly convinced that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs would retreat in the face of a backlash led by the Right-wing socialists (who had meanwhile allied themselves with the bourgeoisie) or would butcher one another for the lion's share of power, but that on no account would they lend the Revolution the assistance it needed to proceed without interference along its creative path.

Convinced of this, I assembled some comrades from the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation (who brought along some sympathetic workers and soldiers) and my comrades from the Gulyai-Polye detachment and, with a dead feeling in my soul I confided to them my fears regarding the Revolution which was—as I saw it—threatened with annihilation on every side and most especially from the direction of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.

It were better for the Revolution, I told them, that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs had not formed any bloc, for none of their principles could restrain them in their thirst for power which infallibly must lead them on to a falling out and, by dint of their interneccine rivalries, to the inflicting of a tremendous wrong upon the Revolution.

‘Already,’ I told my friends, ‘We can see that it is not the people which enjoys freedom, but rather the political parties. The day is not far off when the people will be utterly prostrate beneath their boots. It is not the political parties which will serve the people, but the people who will serve the political parties. Even now we note how often, in issues of direct concern to it, there is merely a passing reference to the people as all decisions are reached directly by the political parties. It behoves the people merely to listen to what governments tell it!’

Then, having vouchsafed to them my impressions and my deep-seated conviction that it was time to prepare for battle, I set before only a tiny intimate band of anarchists and not all the comrades, the plans I had devised since July-August 1917 and which I had in part put into effect in the task of organising the peasants. These might be summarised thus: so long as the peasants aspire to be their own masters, we must approach their autonomous local institutions, explain to them all the steps taken by the socialists in their march towards power, and tell them that the Revolution which they had carried out heralded something quite different: it heralded the right of the masses to freedom and to free labour and destroyed all possible tutelage over them by the authorities.

When the will is there, one can always get through to the peasants: one need only settle among them and work honestly and tirelessly alongside them. When, out of ignorance, they attempt to establish something that may turn into an agency harmful to the development of a free society, it has to be explained to them and they have to be convinced that what they aim to do will be a heavy burden upon them and something else which, while meeting their needs, is at odds... with the anarchist ideal has to be proposed to them.

‘Our ideal is very rich and, starting right now, many aspects of it can be put into practice by the peasants for their greater good.’

But some other plans were of quite a different order and concerned conspiratorial work. I did not mention them that day to the comrades, but ceaselessly I prepared the members of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group in this sense in the hope that whereinsoever, by dint of its intensive work, it might have established links with the population, we might put them into effect at an early date.

In the course of this intimate conversation with the Aleksandrovsk comrades, I resolved to quit the Revolutionary Committee and to go back to Gulyai-Polye with my whole detachment.

That very day I came across comrade Mirgonodslay (a Left SR) and invited him to dine with me at the Federation's restaurant. When he arrived, I could not help myself telling him that, the next day, I would announce to the Revolutionary Committee that my detachment was withdrawing me from the Committee and would be refraining from appointing anyone in my place.

Comrade Maria Nikiforova and several other Federation comrades begged me not to be so hasty about it. Mingorodsky also attempted to reason with me: but I could not go back on a decision which had been taken in conjunction with my detachment and which it remained only to convey formally so that the Committee would not misinterpret it.

At the federation, not everyone was au fait with my decision and when they learned of it they asked me to explain the reason and intention behind my departure. At the time there were also some workers sympathetic to the Left SRs at the Federation. They too were particularly insistent upon my explaining myself.

So I had to reiterate to them what I had already explained to some comrades.

I told them that in my view, the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc had already placed its unity in jeopardy, just when it had scarcely been formed. That, as I saw it, was due on the one hand to the historical and philosophical discrepancy between the Social Revolutionary theory and Marxism and, on the other, to the vanity which induced the parties to seek to devour one another in their overwhelming lust to direct the Revolution.

'It strikes me as quite apparent that the day is not far off when those two parties who presently reign over the country will fall out and fight with one another until they have annihilated one another, taking the Revolution down with them and everything good about it.'

'Why the devil was I squandering my energy here when I could see the real Revolution being born in the countryside. The peasants are beginning to achieve self-awareness, they're displaying their readiness to struggle for an ideal of justice and they must be helped!' I shouted in a fury, while the comrades grew more and more astonished.

'I do not mean, comrades that you should all go to the peasants. I know you well. You are accustomed to the town and linked to the workers. Work here, but remember that here the Revolution is in the process of throwing direct action overboard in favour of the orders and ordinances of revolutionary committees, whereas in the villages it will not be possible to do so that easily. The soul of Revolution is alive out there, here the soul of counter-revolution. Only intensive organisation of the Revolutionary forces in the villages will be able to prevent the sacrificing of the Revolution.'

My anarchist comrades and their Left SR sympathiser friends replied that time would tell and that, for the moment, the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc was not straying from the path of the workers' and peasants' Revolution: 'It keeps to it solidly. The majority of the toilers see that and support it in its action. To conduct propaganda against it or to foment a revolt would thus open the way for a semi-bourgeois authority of the Kerensky ilk, or, what would be even worse, consolidate

the Central Rada, which has all but completely dodged the struggle for the social emancipation of the toilers—and that would be to commit a crime against the very idea of Revolution.

‘We deplore,’ these comrades of mine continued, ‘your attitude towards the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, and we would be happy if you would adopt a different approach to this matter. You yourself are forever saying that revolutionaries should always be where the people are, in order to broaden, deepen and prosecute the Revolution.

To date both you and we have done just that. What is there to prevent us from continuing? Each of us knows that if the bloc were to veer to the right, or if it were to try to stop the workers before they have reached their goals ... freedom, equality and independent labour... we would immediately mount a campaign against it. And then each toiler would see and understand that we were right to stand up against the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs.’

I recall that Maria Nikiforova and all the friends who worked alongside her in that town were especially staunch advocates of that line. She herself several times mentioned the name of comrade A. Karelin, saying that prior to leaving Petrograd she had deliberated with him at length upon this matter and that he had told her that that was the best stance we could adopt vis à vis the Bolshevik-Left SR authorities.

However, the reasonably well-founded arguments of my comrades failed to shift me. I was profoundly convinced that the bloc would not, could not survive for long. Apart from those I have already noted, there were other omens. Lenin was acting beyond any control, and that not only uncontrolled by the Left SR party allied to the Bolshevik Party, but also uncontrolled even by the latter, whose leader and creator he was.

Having myself organised the peasants of Gulyai-Polye and region, outside of any Bolshevik or Left SR influence, I drew significant conclusions from this fact.

Indeed, I guessed Lenin’s intention: to turn the left wing of the SRs (who numbered not one single member of the original core-group) into a puppet in his own hands.

This is why I refrained from making any reply to the comrades and simply told them once more that I was going back to Gulyai-Polye all the same.

While we were talking about the bloc and of the Revolution’s future, over which the bloc sought to have the upper hand, the commissar of posts got a telephone message from Gulyai-Polye to me, announcing that agents of the Ukrainian Central Rada had arrived there and that, while professing to be supporters of the soviets, were conducting a strenuous propaganda drive to get the soldiers who had come back from the external front to set up koureni haidamak in Gulyai-Polye and region, and that the chauvinists had already begun to put that organisation into operation.

The message was signed M. Shramko and it helped me to quit the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and hasten my departure for Gulyai-Polye.

Once having drafted my official recall, I went to the Committee to hand in this document to the appropriate persons and to say my farewells.

The committee took a dim view of it, and the Bureau deplored it, albeit in moderate terms. When I had explained the reasons for my hasty departure to them along with the whole detachment, comrade Mikhailevich, the chairman of the Committee, asked me to step into an adjoining room with him and said he was overjoyed to see me return to Gulyai-Polye.

‘Your presence there, comrade Makhno, is crucial to say the least. Furthermore, you already know, I believe, that, in accordance with a project of the party’s leadership, we intend to split

the Aleksandrovsk district into two administrative units, and it is proposed that one of these be placed under your leadership in Gulyai-Polye, comrade Makhno!'

I said in answer to my 'benefactor' that the idea was not one that I found attractive, for it did not fit in with my views on the future and the development of the Revolution.

'But in any case,' I added, 'it presupposes your eventual success, doesn't it?'

'But that is assured. All the workers and peasants are with us and they hold everything, everywhere!' shouted by my erstwhile colleague.

'By the way, have you read the telephone message I have just received from Gulyai-Polye? Did you understand what it said?' I retorted.

'But of course!'

'It would be better to postpone our conversation until later and to issue the order immediately to the commander of Ekaterinoslav railway station to have a train ready in four hours to take the Gulyai-Polye detachment on board.'

Which was promptly done.

I chatted for a while further with 'comrade' Mikhayevich, with the anarchist Maria Nikiforova and other members of the committee. I spoke to them of the revolutionary zeal of the populace which stood ready to do battle: then, having taken my leave of them, I headed towards the railway station where, some minutes behind me, the members of the Committee arrived by car, and the anarchist Maria Nikiforova on horseback. They had come to bid me farewell and to see us off.

I exchanged a few words with the leaders of the Revolutionary Committee. Then the detachment struck up the anthem of the Revolution and the train moved off.

# **Chapter Nine: Abolition of Zemstvo as a 'territorial unit'. Foundation of a Revolutionary Committee by the members of the Soviet. Seeking funds to meet the needs of the Revolution.**

During our absence, when the most energetic peasant revolutionaries, anarchist workers or sympathisers were missing, Gulyai-Polye had received a visit from agents of the Central Rada: they were landowners from the village who had received field promotion to the rank of sublieutenant and who were now being sent out into the countryside, there to preach upon the theme of an independent Ukraine, relying upon the haidamaki and the Cossacks.

We arrived at night and right away, before that night had ended, soldiers returning from the front informed me that they had had a general assembly at which the agents of the Rada had spoken in order to announce that their troops were mustered in Podolya and around Kiev and that they were in a state of combat readiness. Then they had invited the soldiers to organise themselves on the spot and to seize power in that liberated region.

To impress those present, a certain Vulfovich, a self-styled 'maximalist' and a front-line soldier presented to the gathering several anonymous letters asserting that in Gulyai-Polye and neighbourhood, there was a certain Society which could, if the need arose, subsidise the costs of a soldier's organisation, etc.

Not for a single moment did I hesitate in putting an end to this. At 1.00 am., I set off to fetch comrade Kalashnikov, secretary of the anarchist-communist group, and having located him along with some comrades, we discussed everything that the soldiers from the front had reported to me. Then we went to the home of the 'maximalist' Vulfovich and arrested him.

He objected and stated that he would refer the matter to the anarchist-communist group (he knew that from my revolutionary post I occasionally addressed reports to that group, and that we held discussions to see if my actions were not at odds with the task we had assumed in common).

He was sure that his arrest would earn me a reprimand,

Then and there I told him that his freedom would be restored to him just as soon as he had handed over these anonymous letters which mentioned the existence in Gulyai-Polye and its environs, of a Society possessed of the funds to equip troops for the Ukrainian Central Rada. Whereupon the 'maximalist' Vulfovich ceased his protestations and told me that the letters had been given to him an hour before the meeting by citizen Althausen, a hotelier in Gulyai-Polye and uncle to the agent provocateur Naum Althausen who had come to light at the time of the trial of our group.

Citizen Althausen was promptly arrested. I explained the reason why to Althausen and told him that, together with Vulfovich he would be brought by the Soviet for trial before the skhod—assembly of Gulyai-Polye's peasants and workers.

He realised that the situation was taking a serious turn. The skhod-assembly would require of him details concerning the presence in the region of a secret financial agency of the Rada. And he opted to tell the whole truth without further ado.

The Jewish community in Gulyai-Polye, he said, fearing the chauvinists, had determined to make overtures to them by offering financial help so that, in the event of their succeeding, they knew that the Jews supported the Ukraine and those who had fought for her.

Right away he added:

'Take it from me, citizen Makhno, that there is nothing in that that might work to the detriment of the Revolution. It could do harm only to our community, for it will have to pay the money out of its own pocket.' And he pointed to his left pocket.

The comrade members of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, having learned that Gulyai-Polye was all agog, hastened to join us. They were outraged to discover that conduct on the part of the Jewish community and demanded that all its leaders be arrested and questioned so as to discover the truth about their infamous conduct.

Appreciating the hatred which disclosure of this act might inspire among the non-Jewish population of Gulyai-Polye, I saw to it that the affair was not allowed to break. Then I advised that we make do with questioning Althausen and thereafter draw up a detailed report for the skhod of the peasants and workers whom we would ask not to hold the entire Jewish community accountable for an act imputable to only a tiny number of them.

The comrades from the soviet, who trusted me and knew that I was incapable of double-dealing, endorsed my suggestions.

'Citizens' Vulfovich and Althausen were thus released straight away.

Anyone who may intend to write the honest and authentic history of Gulyai-Polye and of its redoubtable rebellion, unique in the annals of Revolution—a rebellion which, having sprung from the bosom of the enslaved peasants, supported by the entirety of the toilers in the region, expanded, in response to the attempts to repress it, into a colossal and not yet abated (alas!) revolutionary upheaval—would have needed to attend that Skhod-rally.

As I say, he would have needed to be present to convince himself of the gravity and also of the extreme prudence with which the toilers broached a matter that in other places in the Ukraine, would unfailingly have unleashed pogroms<sup>1</sup> and the massacre of poor innocent Jews who have been persecuted without respite over the centuries in Russia.

It is true that the attitude adopted by the present writer played some part in this, although he did not in any way seek to minimise the implications of the issue and although he clearly exposed all of the ugliness.

It was determined to abandon the Jewish community to its own conscience and to make do, this time around, with a reprimand for the leaders, though a different line would greet any repetition and they would be hauled, in that instance, before a revolutionary tribunal.

Thus was that matter disposed of. The entitlement of the Jews to participate in all congresses of the Soviets, in all debates and decision-making was in no way diminished. Each person, without

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<sup>1</sup> Pogroms — name given in Russia to popular disturbances targeted against the Jews and accompanied by looting and massacres (Translator's note).

distinction, had an acknowledged right to free expression of his opinion, provided that everybody accepted and respected the right to demolish anything that hindered the development of the social Revolution; for the incipient society required tremendous efforts and exacting sacrifices of each and every one of us.

Hitherto, there had been in existence in Gulyai-Polye a territorial unit known as the zemstvo unit, but that term had fallen into disuse: it had been done away with once and for all by the Soviet which, having arrogated to itself all the social functions, had by agreement with the peasants' skhod, set up a Revolutionary Committee charged with the training and deployment of the revolutionary fighting forces.

The anarchist-communist group, the Left SRs (few and far between) in the region, and the Ukrainian SRs grouped around the Prosvit, with the agronomist Dmitrenko at their head, were invited to join this Committee. As for the Bolsheviks, there were none in Gulyai-Polye nor in the region.

The formation of the above committee was the outcome of suggestions from the anarchist group. As an independent revolutionary unit, insofar as the existence of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc permitted, it provided us with the means of perfecting the organisation of the peasants in a more reliable fashion. At that time, our strength was not sufficient to enable us to focus our attentions in a more determined way upon the workers and, moreover, we still at that point nurtured a vain faith in our anarchist comrades in the towns. The latter, though, conducted futile discussions in a vacuum without taking the least heed of events, which hampered our task. To remedy this state of affairs, the issue was put to the Soviet as to which of its members should be entrusted with leadership of the Committee. And the Soviet, which wanted to see none but an anarchist in that position, appointed me, although I was little inclined to it. Come what may, I knew that the Committee would abide by the policy line indicated by the anarchist-communist group, scrutinised and finalised by the Soviet and endorsed by the populace. Nonetheless, after lengthy discussions, I wound up accepting the appointment.

After I quit the Soviet, there was a wish to entrust the leadership to comrade Maksim Shramko who was not aligned with any party and who had been chairman of the zemstva Council (a position I had categorically refused and the repeated offer of which, at election times, had made me flee Gulyai-Polye). Shramko then assembled a band of marauders and betook himself to the Kossovts-Tikhomirovo estate (some two versts<sup>2</sup> from Gulyai-Polye) which, at my instigation, had been made over to the toilers with a view to establishing an orphanage there. He looted the library which was of some considerable value and only half of which could be recovered afterwards, and carried everything off, down to the windows. This exploit disgraced him in the eyes of the peasants who had until then had a high regard for him. He was put in charge of drawing up an inventory on the estates of the pomeschiki as a prelude to drafting lists for the allocations to be made in spring.

As for the leadership of the Soviet, that was entrusted to Luka Korostelev, an erstwhile active member of our group, for which he had retained his sympathies since the Revolution.

Our group requested a clear definition of the functions of the Revolutionary Committee. The latter stated in the presence of the whole populace that it would dedicate itself mainly to the organising of the toilers so that they might be united in the struggle for the maintenance, expan-

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<sup>2</sup> Verst — roughly one kilometre (1067 metres in fact) — (Translator's note).

sion and triumph of the Revolution, assailed as it was on every side by its enemies who were trying to make of it a puppet in the hands of the political parties vying one another for power.

Our group then demanded that the battalion of the 48th Berdyansk regiment, billeted in Orekhovo (35 versts from Gulyai-Polye) and made up of supporters either of General Kaledin or of the Ukrainian Central Rada, be disarmed.

The Committee was as yet too weak to undertake such action (and the anarchist-communist group knew it) but it deliberately supported this demand. Then our group contacted the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation. They each proceeded from their own localities to Orekhovo and disarmed the battalion.

At this point, the revolutionary authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc still admired the actions of the anarchists.

General Bogdanov, commanding the (?)bla's armed forces, was jubilant, it was said, and was impatiently awaiting delivery of all the weapons stripped from the battalion; if not to himself then at least to the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee, especially since the anarchist Maria Nikiforova who had had a hand in the disarmament operation was still a member of that Committee.

But things did not happen that way.

Since the month of July 1917 the Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group had steadfastly persisted in its efforts to earn the trust of the peasants, to sustain and develop in them that spirit of freedom and independence that their best members—now dead for the most part—had striven to keep alive over a period of twelve years.

Insisting that it be permitted to speak openly, the group was able to preach its ideal with apostolic conviction and stubbornness in a simple, clear language accessible to the peasants, without recourse to the nebulous circumlocutions of the past. It aimed to achieve its objective and to make a reality of all its aspirations. It decided that the time could not be more favourable for the creation of armed cadres, in the absence of which it would never manage to confound its many enemies. With the backing of the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation, all of the weapons... rifles, grenade-launchers, machine-guns, were shipped to Gulyai-Polye and formally surrendered to the Revolutionary Committee.

There was a growing resolve among the toilers of Gulyai-Polye and the surrounding countryside and villages. They sent delegates to us, announcing that everyone, young and old alike, stood ready to take up arms and to defend their freedom and their independence against any authorities, even those of the Bolshevik Left SR bloc if it ever occurred to it to trespass against the new forms of life that the peasants were devising, freely, in their surroundings.

In my capacity as leader of the Revolutionary Committee, it seemed to me that I ought to have been preoccupied exclusively with its affairs, had the Committee been a committee like any other. Now, two or three times each day the anarchist-communist group enjoined me to converse with the peasants' representatives from some village or even some whole region on a variety of issues. For although they sometimes arrived in Gulyai-Polye on personal business, they nonetheless did not fail to present themselves at the group's premises to discover what had not yet been disseminated through its propagandists who were touring the entire region.

Together, we devised plans, seeking the best place to embark upon this or that endeavour and best to bring it to fruition, authorities or no authorities.

‘What joy!’—the peasants used to cry, for instance, as they stepped into the rooms of the group into the Revolutionary Committee and the Soviet of the Peasant and Worker Deputies—‘We are starting to really feel freedom inside and all around us.’

The workload was assuming colossal proportions. Now the financial wherewithal was entirely lacking.

This situation was of great concern to us, some of my comrades and myself, for, in the initial stages, the organisation of combat forces was quite an expensive business. I knew that we needed only to apply to the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and our costs would be covered, but I could not determine upon that, not on the group’s behalf nor upon my own authority, for I had set myself the goal of creating a revolutionary unity among the peasants in a manner wholly independent of every political party and above all of any governmental agency.

It was only after lengthy hesitation that I made up my mind to advance the following proposal. In Gulyai-Polye there was a commerce bank whose funds had been transferred to the State Bank of Aleksandrovsk but which nonetheless continued its accounts business, hoping, even after the October Revolution, to press on with its operations. It could be asked to hand over a given sum to meet the needs of the Revolutionary Committee.

This scheme was evaluated over almost eight days. The group was opposed to it on grounds of principle. It cost me immense effort to get it to agree not to prevent me from putting the question to the Committee. I undertook to assume full responsibility in the event of the businessman’s refusing to comply of their own free will.

In the end the group gave me its agreement but reminded me that, in keeping with its statutes, it might ask me to step down from my position on the Revolutionary Committee and Soviet and restrict myself to the work being done inside the group.

I had always been prepared to do so. Indeed this was the point upon which I had been most insistent whenever we were discussing the clauses concerning the group’s unity and the duties of its members towards it.

Having secured a formal promise that those of its members who belonged to the Revolutionary Committee would not desert me when I asked the businessmen to donate 250,000 roubles—for this I needed the endorsement of the committee and that of the Soviet—I called those two bodies together.

I opened the meeting by announcing that there were rumours circulating according to which the Ukrainian Central Rada was engaged in peace negotiations with the Germans and that the Bolsheviks, who on this count did not see eye to eye with their partners in power, the Left SRs, had hastened to conclude a treaty prejudicial to the Rada and to themselves.

‘It is true,’ I told the gathering, ‘that this report has yet to be confirmed, and that it will be presently. But personally I can even now assert with all certainty that the Rada has indeed put its signature to this dishonest alliance with the German and Austrian emperors, Karl and Wilhelm.’

(Indeed, I was in possession of letters from Odessa and Kholin, delivered by a comrade, confirming this report).

The revolution hangs in the balance. Victory will go to those who are at the ready. We must arm ourselves from head to toe and arm the entire population: otherwise thanks to their alliances the Central Rada and the Bolsheviks will kill off the Revolution. We must make ready to withstand the attack, to break it and salvage what we have won.

We must sweep out of our way any compromise, any act that would make us dependent on the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, just as we have done with regard to the Central Rada and Kerensky’s

coalition with the bourgeoisie. To achieve this, we must act independently on every one of the Revolution's fronts.'

I then explained that we needed money and that they would be very happy in the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee if we were to apply to them for it, but that that would be fatal for us, for the district authorities were only waiting for that in order to trespass on our freedom and our independence.

'But we do need money; that money is right here or, at any rate, it can be obtained through the good offices of Gulyai-Polye without the authorities at all being given the impression that we need them or that we will prostrate ourselves at their feet. As long as we have all our wits about us,' I told my listeners, 'that we will never do'.

Some voices asked:

'Tell us then, comrade Makhno, where this money is to be found and how we can lay hands on it for our common endeavour.'

'I'll explain that to you anon, for the moment, I want to dwell upon what I see in our own ranks and in the ranks of our enemies who come in all shapes, it goes without saying, and who battle on every front verbally against the reaction and for freedom, but in fact are against freedom and for the reaction.'

Comrades, none of you present here, will deny this fact... that the idea of freedom and of economic and political independence has taken root and is spreading among the peasants. Who helped to set them on that course? I say that it is the Revolution and the dogged, often crushing efforts of the local anarchist-communist group of which I am a member.

What the outcome of this will be, is hard to say at present: around us we see only enemies and few, all too few, friends who moreover are not here. They have ensconced themselves in the towns and show themselves among us only occasionally. These friends are anarchists. They alone do not want to see the villages remain forever under the authority of the towns. But they give to the enslaved countryside but little of what they might give it at the present time.

There are, to be sure, reasons for this, but it is hard to comprehend them and express them here, where the issue is quite a different one. Nonetheless, the anarchists are always with us, in thought at least! (applause and shouts rang out of 'Long live anarchy! Long life to our friends!').

Don't get carried away comrades. I come now to the crux of the matter. The essential point is that we arm ourselves, arm the whole population so as to endow the Revolution with a sufficiently powerful force to enable us to begin ourselves to construct the new society by our own efforts, with our reason, our exertions, our determination.

From autumn 1917 on, the toilers of this region had set about making ready for this: but at the present time the dark forces of reaction pose a deadly threat to them: the authority on the one hand of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs and on the other hand, of the Rada which has concluded—and I have this from a reliable source—an alliance with the emperors of Austria and Germany, THERE lies the danger for the Ukraine and for everything fine that the masses have been able to win thanks to the Revolution.

The arming of the whole populace is possible only if the populace acknowledges the necessity of it. Now, in the course of the past week we have—myself on the Committee and the group's secretary in his Bureau—received many peasants' representatives from the region who all, without exception, put that request to us.

But that is not enough: we have to hear that same wish expressed directly by the peasants' assemblies and to discuss it with the peasants so that it may be realised to the greatest effect and

to that end we have to send out propagandists in every direction. We will, in effect, be tearing the peasants away from the preparations for the spring sowing by taking their carts and their horses away from them or indeed, to avert any such need, we will have to hire these from them. But they will have to be paid. So we need money.

Now we have none, but our enemies do, and right here in Gulyai-Polye: there is money in the homes of the pomeschiki, money with the merchants. Their bank is over yonder, just a couple of steps away from our Committee.

Even so, I have to tell you, comrades, that our coffers are empty. All the money is in the State Bank of Aleksandrovsk. But we can have it. We need only agree to one suggestion.

Throughout the Revolution, the bank of Gulyai-Polye has speculated on labour. In point of fact, it ought to have been expropriated a long time ago, and the money placed in the toilers' community chest. Neither the coalition government of Kerensky nor the Bolshevik-Left SR government have done this so far, and they persist in preventing the revolutionary people's doing it for themselves.

I therefore suggest to the Committee that it pay no heed to the government or the Bolsheviks and Left SRs and require the management of the bank, in the name of the Revolution, to hand over 250 thousand roubles, and within 24 hours at that.'

This motion was carried without discussion, and unanimously.

The following day, I visited the bank and explained the decision to its directors. They begged the committee to give them a period of grace of three days then they summoned a general assembly of investors and, at the strenuous prompting of the SD Sbar, signed the cheques which they had themselves shared out among them on a proportional basis. Those investors who were not there received a visit from a representative of the bank and from a member of the Revolutionary Committee who handed them their cheque for endorsement.

Within four days, all the cheques had been collected. On the fifth day, a Committee member, accompanied by a senior bank representative, journeyed to Aleksandrovsk and collected the sum that was to be paid. Thus did the toilers of Gulyai-Polye ensure the success of the Revolution's first steps by obtaining the money needed for propaganda and the organising of free labour, independent of capital and of the State.

One portion of this sum was made available to the soviet of Peasant and worker Deputies. Another fraction was, at my suggestion, used to found and pay for the upkeep of an orphanage for children left fatherless and motherless by the wartime circumstances. It was installed in a house surrounded by a fine garden: it had belonged to the commissar of police. The third fraction and the largest was retained by the Revolutionary Committee. One half of it was placed temporarily at the disposal of the Supply Section of the Soviet, set up by the Soviet and run, under its supervision and with the approval of the skhod of the peasants and workers, by comrade Sereguin, a member of the anarchist-communist group. So well was this Section able to furnish the population with all necessary consumer items that the central authorities took umbrage at it and placed obstacles in the way of its operations.

## Chapter Ten: How barter was organised between town and countryside.

From the outset, the anarchist-communist group had been insistent that its endeavours must retain an anarchist complexion. Thus its tactics had to be tailored to the requirements of the moment and it had to learn how to reject certain choices in time and to devise alternatives to them.

At the start, this drew objections from those of its members who, while wholeheartedly devoted to the cause, were nonetheless disciples of outmoded approaches, to wit... the refusal of organisation, of unity of action, of the possibility of an anarchist's moving on from theory to practice under a regime that was not anarchist and indeed not genuinely socialist either. They used to say to me: 'Comrade Nestor, you must have brought some statist's views on work back from prison and we are fearful lest you embrace them wholeheartedly and lest we be obliged to go our own separate ways.'

That fear, among others, was frequently voiced by my old friend Moshe Kalinichenko, a member of our group since 1907, an educated worker who had read widely.

Nonetheless, everything that I proposed was accepted and put into effect among the peasants during the year 1917, with the utmost success: indeed, they heeded no other social or political group with as much attention and trust as they did ours. They followed our suggestions in every respect: the agrarian question, the repudiation of authority, the struggle against any tutelage at all.

Clearly this pointed out the way ahead: not to hold aloof from the masses but to melt into them, without ceasing to be oneself, and remaining loyal to one's ideals. At all times to forge ahead, with the toilers, regardless of the countless difficulties which lurked along the way and slowed the movement down.

Thus the group members came around to the idea of collective unity in action and most especially in action that had been thought through and was purposeful. They grew accustomed to trusting one another as a natural thing, used to understanding one another and genuinely appreciating one another in their respective spheres.

These traits—crucial in the life and struggle of any organisation and above all of any anarchist organisation—enabled us to weather the vicissitudes of the life of the Ukraine's toilers during these years when 'governments' proliferated.

This mutual trust spontaneously gave rise to the enthusiasm that allowed each individual's energy and initiative to show itself—with the group channelling these in the direction of goals defined by the common consent.

In this regard, the comrade in charge of the Supply Section displayed the utmost ingenuity.

The group knew enough to appreciate him and charged him to establish, using the official prerogatives afforded him by his duties and on behalf of the toilers of Golyai-Polye region, links with the workers of the textile centres of Moscow and other cities and to arrange direct barter

with them. The latter would have to supply the region's population with clothes of the desired quality and colour in a given quantity, while Golyai-Polye would send them corn and, possibly, other foodstuffs, if they wished.

Comrade Sereguin dispatched agents to the towns and himself visited different regions to meet with workers' delegations which, under the supervision of government officials and Cheka members, were touring the country, seeking to purchase corn.

Within a fortnight, he had established relations with the workers of the Prokhorov and Morozov textile plants and in a spirit of brotherhood he arranged with them that barter would take place on the basis of a reciprocal estimate of common needs, with the peasants sending corn to the workers and the workers supplying the peasants the clothes they needed.

I remember the unbridled joy with which, upon his return to Golyai-Polye and without even taking the time to call in at his home, he rushed to seek me out at the Revolutionary Committee and hugged me, saying: 'You are right, Nestor, to stress the need to blend in with the mass of the toilers and toil alongside them, to advise them and explain to them how and at what point they should act. All the toilers are grateful for it.'

He then asked that comrade Kalashnikov, the group's secretary, and comrade Antonov, chairman of the labour section, be fetched. He told them of the gusto and candour with which the delegation from the Moscow textile plants had welcomed our idea about direct barter. He told of the delegation's delight at learning that the idea of a free society had not perished in the countryside, despite the sacrifices it required: but, he added, the workers sensed dark days ahead and that a sombre threat was looming against their most cherished wishes... for freedom and independence from all governmental oversight.

'Of course, the workers said, we don't let ourselves get discouraged, but we cannot help being saddened by the thought of it.'

He also related to us that the delegation had rapturously greeted everything: the meeting with the peasants, the mutual aid arrangement—but that it had anxiously wondered if the government's officials and agents might not intercept everything that might be sent into the towns.

It had indicated the routes by which produce had to be shipped. Two or three days later, two men appointed by the delegation came to Golyai-Polye to hear on the spot the voice of the peasants of this insurgent region.

There they met with a fraternal welcome and were given assurances that every last one of us would stand by the grandiose principles of the Revolution; the freedom and independence of labour vis à vis authority, capital and the State.

After a few days they made their way back to Moscow.

Comrade Sereguin delivered a report to the skhod-assembly of the peasants: at his request, in which he was supported by the group, I added a few remarks to it. I saw in it the finest example, unique in history, of a mutual understanding between two social strata, the urban proletariat and the rural proletariat.

The skhod enthusiastically endorsed this proposal and, undaunted by the idea of seeing their shipment confiscated by the government agents, the peasants spent several days helping the Supply section to load up the wagons with corn and to start them on their way towards the textile centres.

For the purpose of escorting the shipment to its destination, the anarchist-communist group formed a detachment commanded by comrade Skomski. And, in spite of the obstacles raised by those in charge of the marshalling yards, the corn arrived safely.

About ten days later, the workers of the Moscow textile plants dispatched several wagonloads of cloth to Golyai-Polye. But along the route, officials halted them and directed them to the Aleksandrovsk supply depot. 'Because,' they said, 'without authorisation from the Soviet central authorities, it is forbidden for merchandise to be exchanged between peasants and workers. That is the sole prerogative of the worker and peasant authorities and more precisely of the Soviet: now, the latter has not yet given any lead in direct transactions between peasants and workers.' All of this was to the accompaniment of abuse directed against the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region and GP's anarchist group.

Informed of the incident, comrade Sereguin flew to the Revolutionary Committee and sought my advice as to what should be done to prevent the government's Supply Branch from seizing the cloth destined for the peasants. Because if that were done, we would suffer doubly by it: materially, in that we had sent corn, and morally, on account of the frustration of our beautiful initiative which had been prompted by truly social considerations.

'Help us!' he shouted as he wept with his head in his hands.

Keeping calm, in appearance at any rate, we urgently summoned together the Revolutionary Committee and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and we determined to lodge a protest on behalf of these two agencies, with the Aleksandrovsk Supply Section, stating our readiness to denounce the practice as damaging to the Soviet government itself if indeed it truly was solicitous of soviet interests.

At the same time we convened a skhod-rally of peasants. I resolved to dispatch some comrades, Moshe Kalinichenko, A. Marchenko and N. Sokruta, likewise members of the Revolutionary Committee, on behalf of our group, to make it known to the toilers of the region that the government's section had intercepted the cloth which Moscow's textile workers had sent to them.

The group's secretary, briefed by me after consultation with several comrades who attended the skhod, indicated to me that my initiative had been approved.

Then I jotted down on paper the essential points of what they would have to say. I knew them all and knew that each one of them would be able to explain.

Once they had set off, I went with comrades Antonov (chairman of the trades union), Sereguin, Kostelev (chairman of the Soviet) and some members of our group to the general assembly-skhod of the peasants and workers.

It was a veritable reunion of the Zaporozhska Siecha<sup>1</sup> as history has described it to us. The peasants were no longer as ignorant as in those days though, and no longer came together over Church matters and matters of belief. No, they had come together to discuss the trespass against their rights by a handful of individuals in the hire of the government. And they had come along with a full appreciation of their rights.

Comrade Sereguin took the floor. His speech was greeted by unending applause, shouts expressing gratitude for his initiative and cries of outrage at Aleksandrovsk's actions vis à vis Golyai-Polye.

Some others then spoke on behalf of the Soviet, the Revolutionary Committee, the trades union and the anarchist-communist group.

The populace demanded an immediate march on the town so as to drive out the authorities ensconced there who were of no use and downright hindrances to the toilers' undertaking. And these were not empty words. At that point the toilers had at their disposal a sufficient number of

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<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian educational association (Translator's note).

young revolutionary cadres to occupy the town of Aleksandrovsk militarily and to expel, if not shoot, all of the government's functionaries.

'The Revolution has proclaimed the principles of freedom, equality and free labour,' cried the toilers from the enslaved countryside,—'and we want to see them implemented in life: we will kill all who would oppose all that. For all its Revolutionary complexion, the government of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc is an impediment to the expansion of the Revolution's creative forces. So either we condemn it to death or we ourselves will die in this contest. But we will not tolerate the government's placing obstacles in the path of the free development of our forces and of the improvement of our social standing. We will not accept the humiliation and oppression which its agents seek to foist upon us in order to triumph over all that is most fine in the Revolution.'

Yes, the populace of Golyai-Polye was truly ready on the day to take on governmental Aleksandrovsk and any who might have opposed us, was it not?

We had, all of us, been in the forefront of the revolutionary battle: we were hardly going to withdraw now! We were revolutionaries by dint of our attachment to the ideal of justice which the Revolution had selected as a weapon. And we had no desire to sully that weapon with compromises with authority. We were trying to cleanse it of the mud with which the two parties in power had covered it... the all too ignorant Bolsheviks and Left SRs. It was up to us to assert and to develop the Revolution in the life and struggle of the toilers.

Though we may not have been sufficiently strong for this grandiose undertaking, pregnant with responsibility, we nonetheless wanted to have a go at it with what resources we did have, well aware, moreover, of what the real outcome of our endeavours would be.

This is why there was not a single one of our comrades who stood out against the march on Aleksandrovsk; on the contrary, we all made ready for it.

Personally, it was my conviction that it would be up to us, to me and to several of my comrades—like Kalinichenko, Isidor-Petr Liouty, S. Karetnik, Sava Makhno, Stepan Shepel—to show ourselves as the first among equals in leading the revolutionary forces into battle. And indeed it looked as if that was how it had to be.

Shouts flew up from the crowd:

'Nestor Ivanovich, let's have your opinion! We cannot fail to reply to this provocation directed against us by the agents of the Aleksandrovsk authorities!'

In my capacity as leader of the region's revolutionary troops, aware of against whom and what of these had to be deployed, I said what I had to say: that the decision of the toilers reflected their ideas, that their ideas were my own and that I would abide by them.

At which point comrade Sereguin was handed a dispatch from the Aleksandrovsk Supply Bureau. It stated that, having taken cognisance of the telegrams from the Revolutionary Committee and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker deputies, the Bureau had conceded that the cloth destined for the Supply Section of the Golyai-Polye soviet had already been paid for and that the Aleksandrovsk office, in agreement with the other soviet agencies in the town, had decided to let the shipment through. It now only remained to dispatch delegates to take charge of the cloth and escort it to Golyai-Polye.

When the contents of this dispatch were made known, joy overwhelmed those present but the idea of armed resistance was not abandoned. The gathering expressed a desire that comrade N. Makhno should organise the armed forces in such a way as to mobilise within 24 hours and to occupy Aleksandrovsk, if comrade Sereguin had not taken delivery of the cloth within two days from then.

‘There is no reason to mobilise just at present,’ the peasants said, ‘and it would be disastrous and improper to unleash the struggle against the authorities artificially, but only when it is necessary: we have it in mind and always will have.’

Twenty-four hours later, comrade Sereguin reported to me at the Revolutionary Committee that he had been informed by the delegate sent to Aleksandrovsk that the cloth seized by the authorities had been restored to its rightful owners and had arrived at Golyai-Polye railway station. He was going to summon a *skhod* at which he would ask the peasants, as he was authorised to do, to help him to see the removal of the shipment to the General Supply Depot and at which he, along with them, would set the date and establish the means of distributing the cloth that was on its way to them.

He besought me, and other comrades from the Revolutionary Committee and from the anarchist-communist group, to attend that meeting and to help him out by explaining the advantages of such barter between town and village to the populace, if only they might take place on a large scale and include all consumer items.

The meeting dwelt on this theme: the effecting of exchanges between town and village without recourse to the good offices of the political authorities of the State.

The example had been set: without middlemen, the villages could get to know the town better; and the town the villages. Thus two classes of toilers would come to agreement upon this common objective: the removal from the State of all authority in public functions and the abolition of its social authority—in short, its elimination.

The more this grandiose notion spread among the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region, and the more the latter embraced it, the more they made a stand in the struggle against all of the authoritarian principles which were a hindrance to it. They were trying to establish the theoretical value of such direct exchanges between toilers and sought a means of concretely securing their right to engage in them.

At the same time they divined in this the possibility of effectively undermining the capitalist traits of the Revolution, survivals from tsarist times. So that whenever all of the cloth received had been distributed, the populace of Golyai-Polye looked forward to the inclusion of all basic necessities in quantities adequate to serve the entire region in these exchanges. This would have proved that the Revolution had not only to busy itself with the destruction of the basis of the bourgeois capitalist regime but had also given consideration to prescribing in a hard and fast manner the groundwork of a new, egalitarian society wherein the toilers’ self-awareness might grow and develop. Their lives, then, would be committed to the struggle for the triumph of a ‘loftier justice’ calculated to supplant the unfair justice currently in place.

So the toilers of Golyai-Polye strove to come to some arrangement with the toilers of villages elsewhere regarding the implementation of the idea of exchanges between village and town and the reconciling of this with the need to defend the Revolution.

Now, the Revolution’s defences can only be secure and durable if all who do not exploit their fellows grasp its essentially creative character. And that will only be able to come to pass when the populace has realised that after having identified the yoke of the master... the factory-owner and landlord, and of the supreme master... the State, it must itself and on its own account organise its new social and political life and look to its defence. Consequently, the village toilers must link up with their urban counterparts: in this way they will be the more sensible of their part in the creative act of Revolution.

The destructive phase would only conclude once and for all when the creative phase would have begun... and this was a period in which not only the revolutionary vanguard but the entire population, fired by events and striving to help the vanguard by actions and by words to overcome the obstacles which might lie in its path, would have taken part.

During the 10 or 11 months of their active participation in the Revolution, the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region had had many occasions to verify the authenticity of this theory and to implement it in the healthy, free life forged by them day by day.

The local Soviet came to an arrangement with the supply organisations and decided that there were grounds for supporting and developing the idea of exchanges between village and town without the mediation of government officials. Delegates were dispatched to several towns to inquire into various matters and to bring back cloth.

Meanwhile, the peasants began to stockpile corn, flour and other foodstuffs in the general warehouses which henceforth had to have reserves held back for possible future exchange.

This time, however, the peasants' delegates returned empty-handed for the most part. In all of the factories, the authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc had categorically forbidden the workers' organisations to enter into lasting relations of any sort with the villages. To cater for such relations, said the authorities, there were proletarian statist institutions that had responsibility for industrial and agricultural organisation in town and village, thereby consolidating socialism in the country.

It was only in Moscow that the especially revolutionary workforce of the textile plants secured from their socialist masters the right to barter their merchandise once more against produce from the Golyai-Polye region.

But this time the shipment of the cloth was exceptionally difficult. On several occasions shipments had been halted en route and never reached their destination. The governmental 'prodorgans' had seized them and shunted them around from one railway line to another for over 15 days, until rail shipments were completely paralysed: the formidable German armies were advancing upon Kiev and Odessa under escort from spearhead units of the Central Rada and of the Ukrainian SRs and SDs along with their leaders... the teacher Grushevski and the publicist O. Vinnichenko. They had entered into an alliance with the German and Austrian emperors against the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc and now were guiding their allies across Ukrainian territory, pointing out the shortest and most practicable routes to the Dniepr and the revolutionary front.

But the bloc's government, headed by Lenin, could not have failed to note the capital social implications of the move we had tried to introduce by means of these exchanges.

Note it they did. From the moment they appeared, their socialist government, the left of the left, saw in them a danger just as any other government would and sought by one means or another to curtail the spread of this movement.

To begin with the means favoured were detachments charged with severing all links between countryside and town: then the authorities began to fix the degree of loyalty or revolutionary disloyalty of individuals and of the entire class of toilers, their entitlement to assert their intelligence, their determination, their part in the Revolution being made at their expense.

As we have said, the first shipment of cloth had been distributed to the inhabitants of Golyai-Polye and region by the supply Office and the Cooperative union.

Thus it only remained for the agents of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc to abandon these products somewhere on the railway track, thereby leaving them at the disposal of the new authorities which were blocking the passage of German and Austrian bayonets, or to speed them to their

destination thereby showing the toilers of town and village that, despite their having fled, their thoughts were for them rather than for the good for nothings who were on their way.

And so the shipment reached Golyai-Polye and was distributed according to the wishes of its residents.

## Chapter Eleven: Our group's new members.

Around mid-February, three sailors from the Black Sea fleet turned up in Golyai-Polye. Two of them were peasants from the village, while the third was a stranger: he had just settled into the home of his father, coachman to the pomeschik Abr. Zhantsep.

All three claimed to be Left Social Revolutionaries. Two of them, Boris Veretelnik (a Golyai-Polye peasant) and E. Polonski (the unknown quantity) were in possession of cards from the Left Social Revolutionary Committee of Sebastopol. The third, Sharoski, another Golyai-Polye peasant, was not affiliated to any party.

From the first day they arrived, they stood out at the general-assembley-skhod by virtue of their vigorous revolutionary attitude. These were the days when the sailors were considered ardent defenders of the Revolution. The populace greeted them with respect and listened with interest to their speechifying.

I had known Boris Veretelnik since childhood: this is why I felt no misgivings when he introduced me to his friends Sharovski, who belonged to no party, and Polonski the Left Social Revolutionary. I introduced all three to the Revolutionary Committee and they were accepted on to it as members of the propaganda section, on condition that all of their activities in the region would be conducted on the Committee's behalf. They found this acceptable and stayed in Golyai-Polye to work.

The Sebastopol Committee of the Left SR. Party recalled comrades Veretelnik and Polonski one fine day but at their request and with the consent of the anarchist-communist group, I sent a letter, on behalf of the Golyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee of course, saying that these two comrades were needed with us.

They were disturbed no more after that.

Shortly afterwards, comrade Boris Veretelnik broke with the Left SR Party and joined Golyai-Polye's peasant anarchist-communist group. Comrade Polonski remained outside it and professed merely to be sympathetic to anarchism. Even so, he worked alongside comrade Veretelnik and others under the aegis of the group, keeping us up to date with all his activity in the region, exactly as all other members did.

To be sure, Polonski's brother, a Bolshevik who was at that time working on the Revolutionary Committee of Bolshey-Tokmak, sent for him on several occasions, promising him a post on the Revolutionary Committee's bureau: but Polonski always refused, having no desire to leave the Golyai-Polye region for, he said, the rebel mentality which prevailed there had riveted him to his revolutionary endeavour, and in this labour he had partly found his bearings again, to his great delight.

So the resources of our group were growing, its activities expanding, all of its members devoting themselves wholeheartedly to their revolutionary mission.

There was nothing that could have stood in the way of their pressing on with the intellectual and moral conquest of the masses.

Our group was always in the van of the Revolution, carrying the toilers in its wake in the fight against the oppressors. It was at all times a model for the autonomous revolutionary action of the peasants and workers. It taught them how to act and showed them the forms that this activity and its practical application might assume in the struggle that was their own.

## Chapter Twelve: The agrarian communes—Their internal organisation—Their enemies.

February-March<sup>1</sup>. The time had come to share out all that had been seized from the pomeschiki in autumn 1917 (livestock and tools alike) and to settle upon their estates peasant and worker volunteers organised as agrarian communes. All of the region's toilers were alive to the importance of such a move, to the construction of a new life as well as to its defences. Under the supervision of the Revolutionary Committee, former front-line soldiers set about depositing with the community chest all of the equipment and animals which had belonged to the pomeschiki, leaving each pomeschik with two pairs of horses, one or two cows (according to the size of his family), one plough, one seed-drill, one mower, etc. while the peasants took to the fields to complete the parcelling out of the lands. At the same time, some peasants and workers who had set themselves up back in autumn as agrarian communes, left their villages and along with their whole families, took possession of the erstwhile estates of the pomeschiki, paying no heed to the fact that in the wake of an agreement with the emperors of Austria and Germany, the Red Guard combat units of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc were evacuating the Ukraine and abandoning it, with its feeble detachments of revolutionary fighters, to an unequal contest with German and Austrian regulars backed by the armed bands of Central-Rada.

Scarcely had they settled in than without delay they set about organising their forces: some were employed on springtime farm chores, while others set up combat units designed to defend the Revolution and the gains in which the toilers of these parts had set a model for the entire country.

The bulk of these agrarian communes were made up of peasants; some contained peasants and workers alike. They were founded primarily on the basis of equality and solidarity between their members. Everyone, men and women alike, worked in concert with a clear conscience whether they toiled in the fields or were employed in domestic duties.

Cooking was communal. So was the refectory. But the urge of one of the members to prepare his own meal for himself and his children, or to take part in the communal preparation of meals and then take it home with him met with no opposition. Each individual, or even an entire group was free to make what provision it chose for his food, provided always that all of the other commune members had prior notification so that the steps required by these changes might be implemented in the kitchens and in the larders.

There was an equal obligation upon all members to rise early and set promptly to work with the oxen, horses or other domestic tasks.

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<sup>1</sup> That is, of 1918 (Translator's note).

Each one had the right to absent himself, whenever he so desired, but he had to warn his nearest workmate so that the latter might stand in for him during his absence. This applied to working days. On rest days (Sundays) members would absent themselves on a rota basis.

The work schedule was worked out at meetings in which everyone participated; consequently they then knew precisely what was to be done.

That left only the educational question outstanding, for the communes did not wish to re-establish schooling along the old lines: from a selection of new options, they plumped for the anarchist schooling of F. Ferrer of which the communes had heard a lot of talk through the many reports and pamphlets distributed by the anarchist-communist group. But there was a shortage of individuals conversant with the methods of that school and the communes attempted to get some from the town, with our group acting as intermediary. It was determined that should this prove impossible, we should make do, for the first year, with attracting persons capable of teaching.

Within a radius of 7 to 10 versts around Gulyai-Polye, there were four of these agrarian communes. And lots of others in the region as a whole. If I dwell most especially upon these four, it is because I organised them myself. All these fine ventures in the early days were launched under my supervision, and all important issues were always referred to me in advance.

As a member of one of them—the most important one, maybe—I spent two days per week helping out in all its tasks; during the spring planting, I helped with the hoeing or planting otherwise I involved myself with the farm work or lent a helping hand to the mechanic at the electricity station.

Four days I spent working in Gulyai-Polye in the anarchist-communist group and on the Revolutionary Committee. I was asked to do so by all of the group's members and all the agrarian communes, in view of the requirements of the moment which made it necessary for all revolutionaries to rally round and bond together to fight against the forces of reaction arriving from the West in the shape of the German and Austro-Hungarian imperial armies and the troops of the Rada.

In every commune, there were some anarchist peasants, but the majority of the membership was not anarchist. However, they displayed that anarchist solidarity of which they alone are capable in everyday life with their simple natures not yet reached by the political poison from the towns—which always give off a whiff of lying and treachery which even many comrades who style themselves anarchists are not spared.

Each commune comprised about ten families and included 100, 200 or 300 members in all. By decision of the regional congress of agrarian communes, each one received a normal allotment of land—which is to say as much land as its members could cultivate—located in the immediate neighbourhood. In addition, they received the livestock and farm implements which already existed on these estates.

And so the commune toilers set to work, to the sound of free and joyous songs, reflecting the spirit of the Revolution and of those among them who had perished in its cause or who had, over many a long year, pressed on with the struggle for the great ideal of justice which was fated to triumph over evil and to become the torch of humanity. They sowed and did the gardening full of self-confidence, determined that they would not allow the former estate-owners to seize back the land which they had won from those who, without their ever having worked on it, had possessed the title to it by government licence and who were now striving to recover it.

The inhabitants of neighbouring hamlets and villages, still partly bereft of consciousness and under the sway of the kulaki, were jealous of the communards and more than one showed an urge to wrest everything back: livestock and tools, so as to share them out among themselves.

‘The free communards will always be able to buy them back from us later, should they so wish,’ they said. But such views were severely judged at the skhod-rallies and at all the congresses, by the overwhelming majority of toilers who saw in the organising of these communes the happy overture to a new social life which, as the Revolution approached the high point of its triumphant progress, would only develop, grow and give a fillip to the establishment of a kindred society, if not in the whole country then at least in all of the villages and hamlets in the region.

They looked upon the free commune arrangement as the loftiest form of social justice: even so, for the most part, they did not make up their minds to adopt it immediately, pleading the approach of German and Austrian troops, their own disorganised condition and their inability to defend this system against new authorities, revolutionary or otherwise.

For this reason the region’s revolutionary toilers made do with trying to support by one means or another those bolder souls among them who had organised themselves on the erstwhile estates of the pomeschiki, into free agrarian communes and were living an independent life there on a novel basis. A fraction of the pomeschiki, kulaks and German settlers realised that, one way or another, the masters who had in their possession these thousands upon thousands of dessyatins<sup>2</sup> and worked thanks to the labour of others, would not be able to stay much longer. Wasting no more time, they rallied round the Revolution and organised their social life upon quite new foundations, which is to say they dispensed with batraki<sup>3</sup> and the right to lease out their lands.

The joy of the oppressed was dawning on all the liberated estates, and the toilers, who had for so long been humiliated by political, economic and social inequality, were beginning to come to life and to understand their slavery and were bending all of their efforts to struggling free completely and forever from this shame. Already it looked as if this liberation was on the brink of becoming an accomplished fact, the masses themselves having set about making a reality of it. The notion of freedom, equality and fellowship among men was finally beginning to permeate the very lives of the toilers and thus put paid to any possibility of further servitude,—yet at this very moment, the governmental messengers of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, abetted by Lenin’s political guile, peddled with growing frenzy the idea that they had a right to dispose of the Revolution and to subject the whole populace to their government—which, they claimed, was the sole defender of the ageless desires of the masses.

This lust for power had so brutalised the Statist socialists that for a time they set aside their fundamental differences over the peace of Brest-Litovsk which they had concluded with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors and which had been greeted with hostility by the revolutionary populace. They temporarily neglected that capital issue and the turbulent discussions sparked by it for now another, no less important problem was looming before them. How could this remain the pioneers and leaders of the Revolution in the eyes of the masses without losing ground manage to distort the very idea of social revolution, to see their secret aspirations realised... the diversion of the Revolution from its autonomous, creative course and its complete enslavement to Statist doctrines, as emerging from the ordinances and directives of the party’s central Committee and the government?

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<sup>2</sup> Dessyatin—around one hectare (1092 sq. metres) (Translator’s note).

<sup>3</sup> Farm labourers. (Translator’s note).

It was quite apparent that in the orientation they had stamped upon the great Russian revolution, there was no place for freely organised autonomous agrarian communities on conquered estates, nor for the transfer of workshops, factories, printing-works and other concerns into the hands of the workers.

Acts emanating directly from the toilers reflected their anarchist tendencies clearly. And that was what scared the left-wing statist socialists most: for the toilers of village and town were marshalling their forces precisely for that purpose and were preparing to unleash an anarchist revolt against the very principle of the State so as to strip the latter of its main functions and restore these to their autonomous local authorities.

In so doing, the toilers were displaying great daring and though their revolt was not yet thoroughly organised, it was at least being pursued tenaciously.

If, along this way, they had encountered effective help from revolutionary anarchists, they might have succeeded in fully realising their dreams and would have attracted all of the active forces of the Revolution to their side. This would have put paid to the myopic, incoherent action of the new socialist leaders which, along with Lenin, Ustinov and company, were trying to foist upon the mass of the toilers. And the Bolsheviks' ignoble terror, directed against humanity in general and in particular against those who clung to their personal convictions and who ventured to pass judgement upon them and their so-called 'proletarian' government, would never have appeared in Russia, nor in the Ukraine, nor in the other Bolshevik Republics.

Alas! we revolutionary anarchists have never been capable of embracing the people's great acts of revolution in their full dimensions, of grasping their full implications and of helping them to develop them to their full extent and effect. And here again we were also powerless and that quite simply on account of the absence, in these most crucial days of the Revolution, of an organisation, however rickety.

By contrast, the left-wing State socialists, though they did not side wholeheartedly with the direct revolutionary actions of the toilers, nonetheless quickly grasped them. They acknowledged that, from the point of view of their principles, they could not back them for such popular acts, if they were to come to fruition, would put paid to their dreams of power and compel them to step down from the governmental peaks which these new masters had reached by climbing on the backs of the direct defenders of the Revolution. So they wasted no time in making their move, which is to say that they not only allowed Lenin's government to bridle the revolutionary toilers of town and countryside by means of decrees handed down from above, but took a personal hand in this, thereby contributing to disorganising them just when they were, succeeding in efficiently marshalling their forces for the first time. These leftist parties brought about a halt in the process of destruction on which basis exclusively the process of rebuilding can base its launch and attain its full development: such a development and thus the Revolution was thwarted from reaching its last phase, can only be a swing against all that is outmoded and rotten in the old society and everything that is quite useless in a human society in the healthy sense, but which always tends, in times of great psychological upsets, under the most varied aspects and forms, hastily and superficially camouflaged, to carve out a place for itself again in the new, free social arrangements.

These left-wing statist socialists, capitalising upon the childlike candour of the Russian, Ukrainian and other people, abused their trust. Statist principles made the toilers deviate from their path of broadening and intensifying the Revolution and brought disorganization into

the incipient free society, thereby warping éoo individual and social traits and consequently, slowing the process of its realisation.

It was this fact and none other that led to slothfulness on the part of supporters of the toilers' liberation, while their enemies, reviving, speedily organised themselves and set to work with an eye on the balance of forces.

In most instances, such moments are favourable to the new authorities: then they can easily captivate the toilers, that dedicated vanguard of the Revolution and distance them from the broad, creative revolutionary front which grows up outside them. It was precisely in such circumstances that the Ukrainian toilers were steered away from it. The policy of the Brest-Litovsk treaty with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors made a large contribution to this. (It is time to point out that the Left SRs protested strenuously against the treaty but, as allies of the Bolsheviks in their endeavour of captivating and misleading the toilers, they kowtowed to the fait accompli. Just like the Bolsheviks and indeed along with them, they pulled all of the armed Red Guard detachments out of the Ukraine, in accordance with the Brest-Litovsk treaty.).

Following the conclusion of this treaty, all of the Revolution's armed forces, made up of Russian workers and peasants, were withdrawn from the front by the government of the "Soviets", dominated at that time by the two socialist parties, the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. And in withdrawing they offered scarcely any resistance to the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary monarchist armies or to the Central Rada's detachments.

As for the Ukrainian toilers, these were left, for the most part, utterly disarmed and at the mercy of the executioners of the Revolution as the revolutionary command pulled its weaponry out of the Ukraine or, in its flight, abandoned those weapons to the German troops.

The withdrawal of revolutionary troops from Ukrainian territory lasted for months. During this time, those divisional commanders among them who had not yet been touched by the poison of these political parties did what they could to arm the populace. But the circumstances were quite adverse, and this is why all the weapons could not be handed over to the populace and used by it against the advance of the counter-revolutionary forces. Indeed the withdrawal of the Red Guards turned into an outright rout and the abandoned territories were most often occupied that very day by the forces of reaction, without the populace's even having had any time to organise itself into combat units.

# **Chapter Thirteen: The successes of the German and Austrian armies and of the troops of the Ukrainian Central Rada. Counter-revolutionary agents. The struggle against them.**

In March 1918, the city of Kiev and the bulk of the Ukraine lying on the right bank of the Dniepr were occupied by the German and Austro-Hungarian monarchist expeditionary armies. Following agreement with the Central Rada, led by the Ukrainian socialists under the chairmanship of the very old SR Professor M. Grushevski, these armies invaded our territory and launched their odious attack on the Revolution.

With the direct help of the Rada and its agents, the monarchist command of the German and Austro-Hungarian troops covered the whole of the Ukraine with a counter-revolutionary espionage network. Those troops, along with the troops of the Central Rada, were still on the right bank of the Dniepr but already the whole part of the Ukraine lying on its left bank was infested with their many informers, spies and provocateurs.

At this time not a day went by in Gulyai-Polye proper, and in its environs, without some meeting during which an attempt was made to induce the toilers to turn away from the Revolution.

The logical outcome of the invasion of the most revolutionary area of the Ukraine (i.e. the left bank of the Dniepr) by spies and provocateurs was that all of Gulyai-Polye 's chauvinists banded together into one organisation of a 'revolutionary' complexion which described itself as 'social revolutionary'.

Its leaders were the agronomist Dmitrenko, P. Semenynta-Riabko, A. Volokh and Prikhdko. These four were sublieutenants. Most of them were big estate owners and one of them, Volkov, owned a cloth factory.

These landlord-sub-lieutenants had long regarded the work of the revolution with fury as it stripped them of their estates for the benefit of the community. However, they styled themselves revolutionaries and under this flag of convenience they campaigned against the activities of the Revolutionary Committee, the Soviet and the farming Committee. Becoming solidly convinced that the inspirator behind these bodies, the one who had shown them the way in agrarian and sociopolitical affairs, was the peasant anarchist-communist group, they attempted, at first secretly behind the scenes but later openly to represent anarchists generally and the Gulyai-Polye group in particular as 'robbers' and 'brigands' who were heedless of 'the laws of the Revolution and of the limits beyond which it should not have gone'.

These ‘revolutionaries’ cited in evidence the other regions where the anarchists had not penetrated the ranks of the toilers and where the populace had not sought to resolve the land question without the Provisional Government. ‘Whereas here in our own Gulyai-Polye and adjoining regions,’ these ‘revolutionaries’ argued, ‘that question was resolved by brigandage back in 1917. And all this is down to the anarchists’.

Such charges, ventilated by folk professing to follow the socialist flag, served only to undermine themselves and their ideas.

The peasants of Gulyai-Polye had been consistently in contact with the anarchists over two years in the days of secret revolutionary activity: later, they had seen them at close quarters for a year, quite openly in the van of the revolution and they were confident that they would always remain on their side. And they all hooted down these phoney revolutionaries who mistakenly insulted us by comparing us to robbers and brigands.

As for ourselves, we merely set the work achieved by our enemies with the toilers in the months gone by alongside the feats achieved during that time by numerous anarchist peasants and workers in the organising of agrarian communes on the former estates of the pomeschiki.

Acknowledging that the anarchists were right in their very conception of the Revolution and of the toilers’ entitlement to complete self-liberation from all the bonds of slavery, the village toilers continued to press ahead themselves with the revolutionary endeavour, despite the snares laid for them by their enemies.

Equality, freedom of opinion and independence for each and every individual in Gulyai-Polye and region bore fruit: the toilers became conscious of their dignity and came to appreciate what their role was in life and in the struggle against their oppressors, whether right or left. However, such conduct made the statists uneasy: terrified by the prospect of their authoritarian principles coming to grief, they began to take action against the toilers and in so doing did not shrink from resorting to every weapon within their grasp.

Even as the chauvinists’ ‘revolutionary’ organisation in Gulyai-Polye was embarking upon its impudent campaign against the anarchists, the victorious progress of the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary armies, preceded by the equally counter-revolutionary detachments of the Central Rada was already, throughout the Ukrainian territory located on the right bank of the Dniepr, baying at the heels of the Revolution which had been utterly disarmed by the Brest-Litovsk treaty concluded between the Bolshevik Party and the supposed masters of the aforementioned armies, the German Wilhelm and Karl of Austria-Hungary. I cannot say whether the Ukrainian social-chauvinist leaders who had embraced such a treaty were fully cognisant of their odious attitude vis à vis the Revolution. But their disciples assuredly had not realised this: for they clung to that shameful alliance and to the armed assistance which it offered them, this being the only means of releasing the Ukraine from the Revolution and of reestablishing tsarism on Ukrainian soil.

Gulyai-Polye’s chauvinistic social ‘revolutionaries’ announced day in and day out at their meetings that the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and the detachments of the Ukrainian Central Rada were approaching, trampling and crushing underfoot all of the resources of the revolution: and as the toilers, who took the view that freedom of speech as a right as inalienable as freedom of opinion, made no move to hamper them in their odious propaganda, they derived some comfort from this and organised a general assembly-skhod.

It promised to be of the utmost interest. Its organisers were to have raised the following question at it: who among the toilers of Gulyai-Polye are supporters of the Central RADA (and

thus of German and Austro-Hungarian militarism, which was spearheading an army of 600,000 men against the Revolution), and who among them are not? And in the latter instance, under what flag do they line up?

All of the operators racked their brains for arguments, plumbing the depths. They lied without the least sense of shame. 'For 'Mother Ukraine', for her independent government, her prisons, jailers and executioners everything had to perish without resistance... both the Revolution and the freedom and the toilers of town and village who have defended them.

'Otherwise, in the event of resistance,' said these social-chauvinist speakers, 'we will eradicate all of it by force, with the help of allies, our brethren.' (They meant Wilhelm II of Germany and Karl of Austria-Hungary, together with their armies.)

Those who do not resist the powerful armies of our own allies will receive from the German command, and through the Rada, sugar, cloth, footwear which thousands of trains are bringing in their wake. (There was a complete shortage of these items just at that time.)

But for those who resist, there will be no quarter! Their villages and towns will be utterly destroyed by fire; the population will be taken away into captivity and one in ten prisoners will be shot.

And the remainder? For their treachery, the rest will suffer terrible chastisement at the hands of their own brother Ukrainians!'

Hearing these pronouncements, I took the floor and asked that all of the speakers belonging to the meeting organisers' party give accurate information in their speeches.

Then I directed some explanatory comments to the citizens there present apropos of the assertions advanced by the advocates of the shameful alliance between the Central Rada and the emperors, and I drew certain conclusions from what the speakers and those who had contradicted them had had to say.

The meeting backfired on the intentions of the people who had organised it and to the detriment of all the notions they had argued and championed at it. By an absolutely overwhelming majority a resolution was passed urging all toilers to support active armed struggle against the Central Rada and the German and Austro-Hungarian armies of counter-revolution.

This was not to the satisfaction of the meeting's organisers. They asked the assembly to specify the flag under which this struggle was to be waged against the Rada and the allies who had 'fraternally' offered them a hand in their endeavour for the wellbeing of the Ukraine.

The assembly acceded to their request. A vote was taken and basically the demonstrators split into three groups, one of which sided with the meeting's organisers which is to say with the Central Rada, while another took the side of the Left SR, Mirgorodsky and the third kept faith with the anarchist-communist peasant movement of Gulyai-Polye .

When an attempt was made to count the support of each group, the faction which had come out on behalf of the left SR Mirgorodsky sided, as also did its leader momentarily, with the supporters of the meeting's organisers.

(It was hard to comprehend Mirgorodsky's role on this occasion: when an attempt was made to question him about his position, he was able to offer no satisfactory explanation and acknowledged the error of his Jesuitical manoeuvre only after the meeting had been wound up).

However, despite the amalgamation of these two factions, the backers of the Central Rada found themselves absolutely in the minority. The resolution passed by the citizens present at the meeting was ratified by them and supplemented by even more direct attacks on the Rada and the German armies who were marching in step with it.

Then the leader of the Ukrainian chauvinist organisation, the self-styled 'revolutionary socialist', sublieutenant Pavel Semenyuta-Riabko mounted the rostrum and in belligerent tones announced to the toilers:

'No matter! You will rue it some day. But not everybody will be forgiven, especially the anarchists! The time is not far off when our army will enter Gulyai-Polye. We will explain ourselves then. Bear it in mind that our allies, the Germans, are mighty! They will help us to restore order in the country and you will see no more anarchists in these parts!'

These hysterical cries and threats outraged all of the toilers. The anarchist peasants wasted no time in speaking out and announced that they were accepting the challenge. 'But we ask,' one of them said, 'that sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko give details as to the German's arrival in Gulyai-Polye.'

Whereupon the requested information was given.

'The Germans will assist the Ukrainian Central Rada in enforcing its laws on the country and in reestablishing order, which means that anarchists will be imprisoned. It is in prison that you will be able to preach your ideas!' shouted the sublieutenant, beside himself.

From the ranks of his listeners some voices cried: 'Down! Away with him!'

Once again the anarchists designated one of their number to announce to one and all that they could now see clearly that the chauvinist organisation was depending upon the arrival in Gulyai-Polye of the German counter-revolutionary armies. With the aid of that brute force, it anticipated 'chastising' the Revolution.

'No—not the Revolution, just the Bolsheviks and anarchists,' rang out one voice from the group of Ukrainian SR chauvinists.

'Well, get this, you socialist gentlemen! We anarchists will respond to your hateful challenge!' declared our group's secretary.

The meeting closed with these words. The toilers, with a sense of indignation at sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko's threats, made their own way home, outraged.

His backers surrounded him and encouraged by the laughter of their leaders, mischievously called after the departing toilers... 'Get along home. As for us, we're going to wait for the anarchists' response.'

3 or 4 hours later, on behalf of the anarchist group, I formally put the following question to the Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee.. as defender of the unity and solidarity of revolutionaries, what was its view of the threat made to the anarchists by the Ukrainian chauvinist organisation? Did the committee believe it was to be taken seriously, or not?

The Committee examined the issue that very day and its answer to the group was that it ascribed no significance to the threats.

The chauvinists' organisation it argued, was not a revolutionary organisation and aside from pointless palaver it was not in a position to do the least damage to the work of the Revolution. Nonetheless, the anarchist-communist group did not approve of this attitude and once again stated, in a formal note addressed to the Committee, that it was unthinkable that in an endeavour of unity and equality there should be a place for opinions at odds with the principles of evolutionary solidarity. The note demanded that it issue an appeal to the populace soundly condemning the chauvinists' counter-revolutionary organisation and their threats against the anarchists.

The group announced that if the Revolutionary Committee failed to act, it would find itself compelled to withdraw its members from that Committee and could not any longer support it in any way in the future.

Some of those who belonged to it asked me whether I endorsed the group's demands and whether I would abide by its decision if it recalled its members. When I told them that those demands were justified and that, though not a delegate to the Revolutionary Committee but rather to the Soviet, I would abide by its decision, whatever it might be and would do my best to have it enforced in its entirety. All of the Committee's members unanimously and without discussion resolved to examine our two notes once again and to summon the leaders of the chauvinist organisation in an attempt to heal the rift that had arisen between them and the anarchists.

But by then it was too late.

Our group made it known to the Revolutionary Committee that it was declaring terror against all who might dare, then or in the future, following possible victory for the counter-revolution, to persecute the anarchist ideal or its nameless defenders. The first move in this policy was the execution of sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko and this had just been carried out.

In fact, even as this announcement was being made, the leader of the Ukrainian chauvinists had been killed by members of the group. The news of this execution shook the Revolutionary Committee to its very foundations. Its members were dumbstruck, unable either to act or to speak and they seemed utterly stunned, whereas our representatives handled the business in hand with calm. Towards 10.00 am. the next day, a delegation of chauvinists came to the Committee to seek my advice and to ask me to intercede in the conflict between the Ukrainian organisation—they no longer called themselves chauvinists—and the anarchist group.

When I broached this matter later with the members of the Committee, they all refused to consider the affair, declaring that sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko, bedazzled by the successes of the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies, had lost his head, which had prevented him from understanding that the Revolution was not yet definitively beaten and would not forgive any who desired its downfall.

For the chauvinist leader to have threatened the anarchists with the arrival of German troops and with imprisonment had been an act of blatant injustice to the Revolution which almost the entire people defended. The execution of one who had supported the counter-revolution which was drawing near, borne on the bayonets of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and of the Central Rada's marauders, had been nothing more than an act of defending the revolution.

But it had come too late.

The anarchists ought to have killed that luminary of the counter-revolution in the very instant when he had made his threat against them.

'The leader of the Ukrainian chauvinist organisation being an enemy of the Revolution, our view,' said the Committee members, 'is that it is quite out of order for us to concern ourselves with this incident and to make any mention of it in our minutes.'

By agreement with his organisation and on its behalf, sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko had hurled an ignoble gauntlet at the anarchists' heads; it was therefore up to that organisation to settle the affair, to take back the gauntlet and to frame a precise expression of its social and political tenets. Only then might it be admitted on to the Revolutionary Committee and might similar conflicts be averted in the future.'

So the delegation left the Committee and returned to their comrades to report the blame laid at the door of the whole Ukrainian chauvinist organisation.

I have to say that I personally had not approved that response, but had been unable to raise any objection while the delegation was present. It was only after its departure that once again I stated to the members of the Revolutionary Committee that I looked upon them as the expression of

revolutionary unity and solidarity and that, in my view, they could have entered into negotiations with the organisations which asked it to sit in judgement of mistakes by their representatives—mistakes leading to conflicts such as the one we had just sampled with the chauvinists, and that their leader had paid for with his death.

Earlier, at the time of the group's first inquiry regarding the Committee's stance vis à vis the gauntlet thrown down to the anarchists, I had insisted upon the necessity of the Committee's intervening in that dispute. But the bulk of the Committee members had objected, arguing that if the Committee kept out of it, the whole episode would be speedily forgotten by everyone.

I reiterated that now: had the Committee, at the right time, supported my desire to uphold our group's revolutionary dignity as well as its own,—and it was not ignorant of the ties binding the one to the other in the defence and development of the Revolution—then, quite possibly, our group would not have taken the life of the Ukrainian Central Rada's agent.

'It is true that it is now too late to talk about it,' I told my Committee comrades, 'but it is not too late to act and thereby to avert the killings with which the chauvinists might react to this execution and which — let me state it here openly — will unleash terror against all who, out of stupidity, will have become the agents of the dark shadows of the Rada and its allies.'

During this same meeting, the Committee appointed three of its members... Moshe Kalinichenko, Pavel Sokruta and myself... to join the chauvinists and our group in forming a mixed team to look for ways of preventing killings, from whatever quarter they might come.

The chairman of the Prosvita,<sup>1</sup> a certain Dmitrenko a steadfast Social Revolutionary, was asked to represent the chauvinists on this team.

Our group was represented by its secretary, comrade A. Kalashnikov.

Following discussions, it emerged that the Ukrainian organisation was dissociating itself utterly from sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko's actions.

Its representative, Dmitrenko, declared that Semenyuta-Riabko's challenge had to be explained in terms of his rough-and-ready enthusiasm and his painful attachment to his people. The Gulyai-Polye Ukrainian organisation deplored his actions as contrary to its ideas.

Now, Dmitrenko was not sincere. This declaration of his was nothing more nor less than a political ploy.

We had grasped this and our group's secretary, comrade Kalashnikov retorted that... 'in the threat voiced we detected the desire by the entire chauvinist organisation to lay into the anarchists on account of their tenacious fight against the invasion of the territory by the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and the troops of the Central Rada.'

The anarchist group deemed it its duty to eliminate the instigator of this understanding, directed against the anarchists and against their ideas. It killed him and in future stood ready to kill any such malefactors.'

Later I attended a meeting where I asked my comrades to forswear terror, but I was met with a flood of reproaches. Several of them believed they saw in my words an attempt to defend the actions of counter-revolutionaries and were not sparing in their mockery of me.

This effrontery irked me, but the independence of mind which it indicated delighted me: for it gave me a greater sensation of my activity among the younger members' not having been a waste of effort.

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<sup>1</sup> Prosvita (Light of Hope)—Ukrainian nationalist propaganda agency (P.S.).

In spite of everything, my observations for or against terror furnished the basis for a review of this issue: following a series of meetings and serious discussions among comrades, the group abandoned its initial decision and recorded in its minutes that, as long as the revolution's enemies merely shouted without taking up arms, the projected terrorist actions would not be put into force.

For a long time, our younger members were unwilling to take this resolution in and referring to me they hinted more than once that... 'comrade Makhno sought to turn the most inveterate revolutionaries into counter-revolutionaries. In so doing he dealt a severe blow to the unity of the group,' etc.

However, such was the importance of the moment that desertion from our ranks could not be countenanced. Indeed this was a time when counter-revolution, born of the bayonets of German troops, was clearly gaining an upper hand over the defenders of the Revolution who were by now represented only by a few scattered detachments of Red Guards. Consequently, in a region such as Gulyai-Polye, which could still call upon considerable forces to safeguard the Revolution efforts had to be directed along quite different lines.

With even greater clarity and emphasis, the understanding between the various factions had to be affirmed, along with equality and freedom of opinion: for Gulyai-Polye was then a base where the real defence forces of the Revolution were forming up.

This is why I paid no heed to the naive protestations of my young friends. Looming before me, in all of its ramifications, I saw a much more important issue: how to organise volunteer battalions to fight the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, comprising 600,000 men in all.

I felt that the Revolutionary Committee had been negligent in this area and I insisted upon all of the detachments at its disposal in Gulyai-Polye and region being dubbed volunteer battalions and their strength increased to 1500 men.

As I saw it, our anarchist-communist group had to show the way in this as in other matters. Otherwise it would be condemned to be left behind by events. It would drift away from the toilers of the enslaved countryside and like hundreds of other anarchist groups in Russia would be reduced to wielding no influence upon ideas capable of offering guidance to the masses of those who, while believing in the Revolution, had not had time to appreciate its precise import, nor to learn how to defend it against the deviations stamped upon it by the leaders of political socialism.

The group thought upon this and in the organisation of these armed forces, displayed first-class fighting qualities.

In the towns and villages, other groups however were wasting their time on pointless debates like:

'Keeping faith with its principles can an anarchist group set up revolutionary combat units or can it not? Would it not be preferable for it to steer clear of such an undertaking, making do with not preventing its members from participating in it on an individual basis?' To which the Gulyai-Polye peasant group replied with the following exhortation:

'Revolutionary toilers, form volunteer battalions for the welfare of the Revolution! The statist socialists have betrayed it in the Ukraine and are leading the dark forces of foreign countries against it! To smash the reaction's attack, the immense force which the workers represent has to be organised.'

Only by setting up volunteer battalions will they triumph over the machinations of their enemies, right and left!

The Revolutionary Committee and all of the region's soviets took up our watchword and engaged in active propaganda in its cause.

There were, it is true, and especially in the Ukrainian chauvinist faction, some individuals who opposed it. But by now the discussions were merely and sheerly theoretical: in any event, they no longer hinged upon the bayonets of the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary armies and did not take the form of threats directed against opponents of the Central Rada's criminal policy. That policy was targeted against the toilers of the Ukraine and against those of their gains which were asserting themselves ever more clearly as the Revolution developed and towards which they forged ahead, surmounting the most formidable obstacles raised by their enemies:—on the right, the bourgeoisie, on the left, the statist socialists who strove to capitalise upon the occasion to misrepresent the aims of the Revolution and thereby to bring it completely under their control.

Times were dire indeed. It seemed that all of us, group members and members of the peasant's and workers' revolutionary organisations, felt that. And yet a scandal erupted over the trades union of the metalworkers and woodworkers: its members demanded that the group and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputy's recall comrade Leon Schneider whom they had sent to the Departmental Soviet of Peasant, Worker and Soldier Deputies.

The grounds for this demand were that comrade Leon Schneider was not fulfilling his mandate and that as a result the factories and mills of Gulyai-Polye as well as smithies, locksmiths' and other workshops were not receiving supplies of iron, cast-iron, coal and other necessary raw materials at all, or were only receiving them very belatedly.

In view of such allegations against one of its office-holders, the group, following agreement with the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, recalled Leon Schneider so that he might give an account of the reasons why he was being thwarted from performing his mission.

Now, comrade L. Schneider had already had time to succumb to the contagious, chaotic and irresponsible devil-may-care attitude of certain of our urban anarchist comrades. So his reply was that he was unable to return to Gulyai-Polye, being, he claimed, overloaded with work by the departmental Soviet: he invited the group to appoint another representative in his place.

Such an attitude by a member of the anarchist-communist group, so highly regarded by the toilers, prompted us to send him an urgent dispatch demanding that he return immediately to Gulyai-Polye where he would have had to explain himself before the group, the soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and the trades union. If he failed to obey, the group would be obliged to dispatch two comrades to fetch him.

He knew that this was no empty threat and that it would shortly be followed up by an execution order. He would be hunted down for having compromised the group in the eyes of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and the trades Union and thus, in the eyes of all toilers, and a bullet from a rifle might very well be the conclusion to it all.

Two days after receipt of this laconic telegram, comrade Schneider was back in Gulyai-Polye and making his report to the soviets and to the group. He was stripped of his mandate and returned to the Kerner plant where his post awaited him.

While we were embroiled in the sorting-out of the Leon Schneider case, the Central Rada's agents and the agents of the German and Austrian armies which they were leading against the Ukrainian revolution, wasted no time.

They got wind of the episode and peddled their own version of it to meetings here, there and everywhere.

Their misrepresentations had to be steadfastly counteracted. We had to go into every village and hamlet, attend all of the meetings organised by these agents of the Central Rada or of General Eichorn, which cost us quite a bit of time and forced us to neglect the short-term aims of our group: the creation of a combat front against the counter-revolution.

## **Chapter Fourteen: Centralising the detachments. Formation of a united front with the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.**

The pace of events was quickening. The German and Austro-Hungarian armies under the command of General Eichorn, were already drawing near to the town of Katerinoslav: moreover, shells were hurled across the Dniepr from the area of the Kichkas bridge towards the town of Aleksandrovsk which lay 80 versts from Gulyai-Polye.

The Red Guard detachments commanded by General Yegorev, just like the many autonomous detachments which received only weapons and munitions from him and from the leader of the Red reserve armies of 'S. Russia', Belinkeyvich, at their own risk and peril, most often in sectors where there was no enemy presence, were urgently called back from the Crimea towards the Verkhne-Tokmak-Pologi region. Moreover, it could no longer be a question of calling up troops from the echelons as and when required. These had been withdrawn from the front much too prematurely, and this had clearly had an impact on their pugnaciousness. Now they were talking of getting as far away as possible from that front, to branch-lines such as Yessinovataya, or Illovaysk. In point of fact, two days later, they were moved up to meet the enemy armies which, he said in passing, were still on the right bank of the Dniepr.

A certain number of autonomous detachments and a group of Red Guards from the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc heroically repulsed the enemy's attempts to cross the river. But their capabilities were being curtailed by lack of rest, lack of sleep and also by exhaustion of their ammunition supply. Which gave rise to anxiety in Gulyai-Polye and in the region, and then in all the neighbouring regions.

The agents of the swelling reaction popped up again and became more outspoken in their remarks against the Soviets, against the Revolution and against the toilers who saw in it their own emancipation and strove to contribute by one method or another to its development.

These developments had a depressing effect upon the toilers. In many hamlets and villages, there surfaced that disarray which always appears in the ranks of the masses when they are not informed in time of the position taken up in the fight by their revolutionary vanguard.

The disarray prevailing in the region led to weakness and hesitation in Gulyai-Polye itself. Night and day it was the scene of meetings by the Soviet of Peasant and Worker deputies, the trades union, the Revolutionary Committee and the anarchist group. All of them sought my advice and badgered me to tell them what they should do.

And what could I tell them in a moment of such gravity, except to advise them to get a grip of themselves and to meet the counter-revolution with acts at least as energetic and determined as were their words?

To those in attendance at the extraordinary meeting I stressed the necessity of the immediate issuance of an appeal in the name of the organisations that they represented, giving the toilers

an exact explanation of the current circumstances of the Revolution and what had to be done to rescue it. This appeal was published. It urged the toilers to organise armed resistance to the Central Rada which claimed to be eager to liberate them, and to the German armies which were marching alongside it.

The entire population of the region responded to this vehement exhortation. Everywhere, young folk and their elders poured into their local Soviets and into our very village, to enlist in and to form volunteer battalions without delay. The inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye proper formed a battalion comprised of six companies, each of which was 200–220 men strong.

The Jewish community furnished one company which also made up part of the Gulyai-Polye battalion. Out of its own membership and sympathisers, the anarchist-communist group formed a detachment of some hundreds of men armed with rifles, revolvers and sabres: half of them possessed saddled mounts. This detachment was placed at the disposal of the Revolutionary Committee.

On the prompting of the very highly respected doctor Abraham Isaakovich Loss, the toilers of Gulyai-Polye set up medical teams, makeshift hospitals and divided the various medical-aid duties on the revolutionary front among themselves.

For myself, I paid a 24-hour visit to the headquarters of the reserve Red Armies of 'South Russia', Belinkeyvich; I briefed him as to the current objectives of the Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee, and brought him up to date on the organising of the revolution's defences, an activity which at that point occupied pride of place in the attentions of that Committee and of our anarchist-communist group.

Comrade Belinkeyvich paid the fullest attention to what I had to say and promised to go to Gulyai-Polye with me the very next day to see how he might be of help to the Revolutionary Committee and to our anarchist-communist group. But I did not make this promise. I insisted that he give me his answer immediately: could he supply our volunteers with weapons?

Seeing how impatient I was to resolve this matter as speedily as possible, he journeyed to Gulyai-Polye with me that very day.

Thus he was able to confirm for himself on the spot the accuracy of what I had told him and he promised the Committee that he would approach the appropriate individual immediately, and to report back promptly to it concerning the way in which the high command of the reserve Red Armies might be of help to revolutionary Gulyai-Polye.

Returning to Pologi, I had comrade Belinkeyvich call in at Commune No 1 and steered him out into the fields where the free 'communards' were to be found. He watched them at work, asked them the reasons which had prompted them to espouse that lifestyle and was stirred to the very depths of his soul.

En route from the fields back to the 'communards' refectory for the evening meal, Belinkeyvich shook me by the hand and told me: 'From the very outset, I felt tremendous confidence in you, comrade Makhno, and I must ask you now to send your men this very night to fetch from my headquarters the weapons, rifles and machine-guns required by your Gulyai-Polye battalion.'

This promise delighted me and I immediately told comrade Polonski, commandant of the Gulyai-Polye volunteer battalion, and comrade Marchenko, member of the Revolutionary Committee, by telephone, to go to Pologi without delay, to the headquarters of commander Belinkeyvich, to take delivery of the arms and munitions for shipment to Gulyai-Polye.

As we took our leave of each other, comrade Belinkeyvich and I, we promised to help each other out in our revolutionary undertaking. In the eventuality of a retreat, he undertook to place at the disposal of the 'communards' some reserve echelons so that they might fall back in time.

And so the dark days rolled by.

The next day, along with some gunners, I went to Gulyai-Polye's railway station to inspect what we had been sent by Belinkeyvich's headquarters. There we saw six cannon (four of the French type and two of the Russian model), 3000 rifles, 2 carriage-loads of cartridges and 9 wagons-loads of shells for the artillery pieces.

Our delight was indescribable. We wasted no time in removing the most urgently needed equipment to the Revolutionary Committee and shared it among the companies, then we made ready to depart for the front to take on the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors.

The appeal issued by the Committee, the Soviet of Peasant and Workers Deputies and the anarchist-communist group, urging the region's toilers to waste no time in forming volunteer battalions, came to the notice of the command of the Red Guards who promptly dispatched a delegate by special train to have talks with me and to discover what resources the Revolutionary Committee of the proud Gulyai-Polye region could call upon and when these troops, moved by the spirit of anarchism, might be dispatched to the front.

I examined this issue with him into the night of 8 April 1918, at the very time when Lenin and Trotsky were in the Kremlin discussing the annihilation of the anarchist groups in Moscow and thereafter in the whole of Russia (by that time they had already lost interest in the Ukraine). The envoy from the commander of the Ekaterinoslav Red Guards was haunted by the notion that these armed detachments were... in keeping with the Brest-Litovsk treaty... going to be pulled out of the front lines of the revolutionary front and moved nearer the Russian frontier, at a time when the hastily cobbled together battalions of Ukrainian toilers had not yet been trained for combat and were falling back on every side. Speaking for myself, I promised him that I would see to it that, from the following morning on, the revolutionary troops would begin to move up to the front.

After his departure I received the news that the Red Guards were also in retreat in the Aleksandrovsk sector. The Aleksandrovsk command begged Gulyai-Polye's volunteer battalions to come to their aid. Having consulted with the Revolutionary Committee and the anarchist-communist group, I dispatched the detachment formed by the group to Aleksandrovsk, as well as a mixed battalion made up of the peasants from the hamlets nearest Aleksandrovsk. The unit dispatched by our group was a cavalry detachment. The Red Guard command had, in fact, virtually no cavalry at its disposal.

Our detachment was soon sent into the Ekaterinoslav combat zone and from there, on my orders, into the Chaplino area. At the same time, the volunteer battalions from Gulyai-Polye, Konsko-Razdorskoye, Shanzharo-Turkenovsk and elsewhere hastily made ready to set out for the front.

## Chapter Fifteen: I am urgently summoned to Yegorov's headquarters. Defeat for our fighting front.

Circumstances could not have been more critical: the Ukrainian chauvinist movement seemed extinct and nothing more was heard of it. Silently, its members obeyed the mass of the populace, doing what was required of them.

Artillery, then infantry, were organised and we thought of joining battle, until it was noticed that the artillery pieces lacked automatic sights.

I immediately telegraphed Belinkeyvich, asking him for new sights, but no response was forthcoming: that very night the SR agronomist Dmitrenko, together with two young Ukrainian zealots, P. Kovalenko and Mitika Konoplia, had cut the telephone and telegraph lines<sup>1</sup> and thus prevented me from communicating with the Red Guard command. I reported this odious action to all of the peasants. After a few hours, communications were restored and I was passed a message from Belinkeyvich to the effect that the sights and munitions had to be in Gulyai-Polye in certain wagons: in fact they were all discovered and delivered to the appropriate persons.

During this time there appeared in Gulyai-Polye a proclamation from the chauvinist-socialists explaining the Central Rada's alliance with their German 'brethren' who had come to help the Ukraine's sons to 'free her from the yoke of Katzapi'.

It concluded with an exhortation to the populace, urging it to assist the Central Rada and the "fraternal" German and Austro-Hungarian armies to crush the enemy.

Simultaneously, rumours reached Gulyai-Polye confirming that the German armies were laying waste all towns and villages whose inhabitants opposed their progress and that by contrast they were supplying indispensable items, above all sugar, footwear and cloth to all who rallied to them.

More and more often and more and more loudly one heard: 'And what if it turns out that the Germans really do put villages to the torch? Would they burn Gulyai-Polye? What would we do then with our children and our old people?' And, in the wake of these lamentations, some agent of the Central Rada would let slip the word 'delegation' which would then be taken up and repeated by the inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye, one after another.

The word drew my attention. I called together the members of the Revolutionary Committee, those of the Soviet of Peasant Worker Deputies and the anarchist-communist group and I proposed that an appeal with the following lines at its head be published: 'The traitor's soul and the tyrant's conscience are as black as a winter's night.' Then a rally would be organised to explain to the entire populace the provocative significance of the term 'delegation'.

At the same time I learned, on the one hand, that some supporters of the Central Rada had just turned up in Gulyai-Polye and were trying to peddle the line that, on their way back from

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<sup>1</sup> This action only became known 4 months later and Dmitrenko was shot.

the external front they had been imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and had just broken loose: and, on the other, that under the supervision of the father of one of these self-styled escapees, Tikhon Byk, our village was preparing to send a delegation to the German command.

So I asked the comrades to call this meeting as speedily as possible and set off in search of Tikhon Byk, from whom I demanded further details of this 'delegation'. For a long time he steadfastly refused, but whenever he realised that it was pointless he told me not to meddle in that matter: 'it's the people's business'. I did not insist and left him, once having told him that for such an act the people itself would wring its neck, his neck and the necks of all who would leap to his defence.

The appeal was published and the meeting summoned: at it everyone agreed to seek an immediate departure for the front. During this gathering, I was brought a telegram from the commander of the Red Guard detachment, Yegorov, urgently summoning me to his headquarters in the Verkhne-Tokmak-Federovka region.

At the same time, Commune No 2, of which I was a member, informed me that about ten sailors belonging to the staff of the reserve Red Armies of 'South Russia' had arrived by car, absolutely drunk and had killed one of its members and that it was vital they be driven out of there without violence. I set off at haste and managed to persuade them that they should quit the commune. Then I made my way to Pologi railway station where I caught the train for Yegorov's headquarters.

Half way there, I was informed that he had fallen back in the direction of Uzovo: so I took the Verkhne-Tokmak-Tsarekonstantinovka branch-line. At Tsarekon-Stantinovka, I encountered Belinkeyvich and his reserve armies who were withdrawing from Pologi and had also lost contact with Yegorov's headquarters and did not expect to re-establish it before nightfall. I was upset that I had not been able to reach the headquarters in the desired time and... the thought that, whatever the circumstances might be, I had to be in Gulyai-Polye by the morning of 16 April merely added to my unease. I was about to decide to waste no more time on locating him and to go back to Gulyai-Polye when Belinkeyvich told me: 'If comrade Yegorov has sent for you, you must try to see him before you set off for the front. He has probably decided not to send your battalion into the Chaplino sector in that that sector has already been partially evacuated by our forces.'

I was dumbfounded by this news. I decided to wait until nightfall and until comrade Belinkeyvich had re-established contact with Yegorov's headquarters.

Around 9.00 pm., I sent a telephone message to the headquarters staff in Gulyai-Polye and to the Revolutionary Committee to alert them to the fact that I had been delayed for an indefinite period.

At midnight, I received news from Pologi, via Tsarekonstantinovka, to the effect that our village had been treacherously delivered into the hands of the Germans and to the Central Rada troops marching alongside them.

I placed no credence in this odd titbit, which bore no signature. However at 1.00 am., I telephoned Pologi and asked if indeed it had been they who had sent the telephone message to me. The telephonist's reply was: 'Yes, two young people under arms came into my place and one of them handed me the message which you have received. He refused to append any signature.'

I tried to get through to Gulyai-Polye but I was informed that Gulyai-Polye was not answering.

So I made ready to go there myself, but at that very moment received the news that Yegorov's headquarters were located in Volnovaha, some 45 to 50 versts from Tsarekonstantinovka. I made up my mind to go there: but when I got there, it was to learn that he had already left for Dolia. I

telegraphed: 'Is Yegerov's headquarters to remain in Dolia long?' and received the reply that he had already set off again for Taganrog.

I walked out of the telegraph office and towards the locomotive. At which point the echelon of Belinkeyvich's headquarters staff arrived at the station and I saw my nephew Tomes, son of my elder brother, step out of it; with a distraught look he offered a letter to me.

I quickly tore open the envelope and read the following, dated some days previously: 'Nestor Ivanovich, scarcely had you left Gulyai-Polye than Tikhan Byk left also along with some chauvinists. Two stories are circulating here: some say that they have set off after to you, intending to do you to death in a craven fashion. In view of which, be very careful during your return journey, especially in Pologi railway station. Others speculate that Tikhan Byk has gone in a secret delegation to the German armies. Immediately following his departure, I sent two of our friends to his home. His wife claimed that he had set off to visit relations for a couple of days. Even as I was putting these lines to paper, I have just been informed that a delegation from the Central Rada and the German armies have just turned up in Gulyai-Polye. But it is in hiding for the moment, and not showing itself to the populace. I have taken every step to lay hands on it, but am not sure of success in this. So come back quickly: here, without you, we are all sad and depressed.'

The letter was signed: 'Your faithful B. Veretelnik,' and dated 15 April.

I made to question my nephew about events in Gulyai-Polye but my voice broke and, shutting my eyes, I let myself drop on to a bench, gesturing to him that I did not want to hear a word said. Some minutes after, I boarded my carriage and set off for Tsarekonstantinovka—Pologi Gulyai-Polye.

Following the fall-back by the Red Guard echelons, I was delayed by 3 or 4 hours between Volnovaha and Tsarekonstantinovka. Upon my arrival in the latter township, I received fresh news from Gulyai-Polye ... even more unsettling news at that. I read: "My dear Nestor Ivanovich, on the night of 1st April, on a forged instruction bearing your signature, the anarchists' detachment was recalled from Chaplain and disarmed on route. All our Gulyai-Polye comrades, all the members of the Revolutionary Committee and of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies were arrested and await surrender to the German military authorities and to the authorities of the Central Rada, for execution. The betrayal was the handiwork of chauvinists A. Volokh, I. Volkov, Ossip Solovey, artillery commander V. Sharovski and others. Three hours before we were arrested, the Jewish company had been designated to mount guard on the garrison. The wretched traitors, by a subterfuge, forced the Jews to perform this ignominious task.

At the moment of arrest, we were all stripped of our weapons and even received some blows from rifle-butts. Some of our people, not yet disarmed, loosed off some shots in reply.

Our friend Aleksis Marchenko was captured by the very leaders of this treason, but he managed to give them the slip. Whereupon a squad of young Jews was sent out to hunt him down. Marschenko replied by firing some gunshots, hurling two or three bombs at them and disappeared. But he was caught 15 versts from Gulyai-Polye by the Jews from the Mezhirychi (No 4) settlement, brought back to Gulyai-Polye and delivered into the hands of the traitors' headquarters staff.

All of the peasants are crestfallen. Hatred towards the Jews is widespread.

I have given this letter to the sentry Sh... informing him through whom to get it to you. Should you receive it, come quickly, with some detachment, to rescue us.

Your faithful B. Veretelnik

16 April. 9.00 am.

While I read this letter through, Maria Nikiforova's detachment arrived at the station in Tsarekonstantinovka. I briefed her on the events which had just occurred in Gulyai-Polye. She promptly telephoned the commander of a Red Guard detachment, a sailor by the name of Polupanov, who had just then engaged in battle the so-called 'White Guard' invalids from Mariupol. Maria Nikiforova suggested that he fall back to Tsarekonstantinovka so as to join her there in leading an attack against Gulyai-Polye.

The sailor Polupanov's answer was that he could not pull back and he advised her to evacuate the Tsarekonstantinovka-Pologi region as speedily as possible unless she wanted the Germans to cut off her retreat.

But in the interim the sailor Stopanov's detachment showed up, and, a short time later, Petrenka's Siberian detachment, comprising two echelons of cavalry and infantry.

Upon being asked by Maria Nikiforova to return with her to Pologi and thence, under the protection of two armoured vehicles, to Gulyai-Polye, the sailor Spepanov declared that, once he had yoked several wagonloads of fugitives—for whom he was accountable to the commander of the reserve Red Armies of 'South Russia', comrade Belinkeyvich,—to his echelon, he would be continuing his way towards Taganrog. And, to be sure, he promptly set off.

Maria Nikiforova and Petrenko then resolved to return to Pologi and to occupy Gulyai-Polye forcibly in order to release all of the anarchists and other revolutionaries under arrest there and also to lead out of the village, if they so desired, the abused revolutionary armed forces and, at any rate, to carry off the weapons there lest they fall into the German's hands.

While these detachments were preparing to move off, and I was frantically scanning the platform tearing my hair and bitterly regretting having in the first place dispatched the detachment formed by our group to the front, I received a third letter from comrade Veretelnik.

In this one, he told me: 'My dear friend Nestor Ivanovich, the infamous leaders of the treason, terrified by I know what, have released me as well as comrade Gorev, on condition, however, that we do not leave Gulyai-Polye.'

Comrade Gorev and I have availed of this circumstance to organise, in each sotnia, a meeting with the participation of the old peasants. At these gatherings the peasants passed resolutions demanding the immediate release of all arrested individuals and above all of the anarchists, and sent these to the traitor's headquarters. All our comrades were freed.

Numerous young Jewish workers and the entire bourgeoisie, with the exceptions of M. E. Hellbuch and Levy<sup>2</sup> have fled out of a fear of vengeance (however, nobody here would have harmed them, for all our comrades fully understand that the leaders of the treason deliberately cast them in this role so as to be able to orchestrate a pogrom against them thereafter).

The Germans are bearing down on Gulyai-Polye. Our comrades have gone into hiding in groups. The peasants are hastily spiriting away the rifles, machine-guns and munitions and fleeing, some into the fields, some into neighbouring villages.

Some of my friends and I intend to stay in Gulyai-Polye to the bitter end. Maybe we can manage to kill Leon Schneider. When our comrades were arrested at the group's Bureau, he strode in at the head of the haidamaki, tore our banner into shreds, ripping down and trampling upon the portraits of Kropotkin, Bakunin and Sasha Semenota. This despicable act was witnessed by many workers, peasants and peasant women.

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<sup>2</sup> Both these men, wealthy but honest Jews had always, in their lives, abided by the decisions taken at the skhods-general meetings of the toilers and had always condemned the old regime.

I have not, myself, seen L. Schneider, but I hear it said on every side that he delivered an infamous address to the haidamaki. We shall speak of that again later. Take good care not to fall into the clutches of the Germans. It would be better if you refrained from coming to Gulyai-Polye. You can no longer do anything for us: the Germans have occupied the townships of Orekhovo and Pokrovskoye and will very likely be among us in two or three hours time.

We will meet with you again.

For the time being, be cautious.

Your faithful B. Veretelnik'

16 April, 3.00 pm.

Scarcely had I finished reading this letter than I rushed over to Maria Nikiforova and, together, we scurried towards comrade Petrenko. I read it to them both and told them that, in my opinion, the time was no longer right for us to go to Gulyai-Polye, which must be occupied by the Germans. As for driving them out with our detachments alone, that was not even to be dreamed of and moreover, they would probably not even have let us get that far.

'If it is true,' I said, 'that they have occupied the township of Orekhovo, the likelihood is that they are, even now, bearing down upon Gulyai-Polye and if it is true that the Red Guards have abandoned Chaplino to them and are evacuating Grishino, then already Gulyai-Polye must be behind the German's lines.'

Though comrades Nikiforova and Petnenko had begun by poking fun at me, saying that I was wholly ignorant of their strategies and that I did not know the fighting prowess of their detachments, they nonetheless made haste to turn their locomotives towards Volnovaha: as for Pologi and Gulyai-Polye, they no longer even came into it.

Whenever I asked them: 'Why such haste? Could you have received disquieting news from this sector?', Maria Nikiforova answered that the Germans had occupied Pologi and Verkhne-Tokmak railway station and had surrounded comrade Mokrousov's anarchist detachment on the Verkhne-Tokmak-Berdiansk line.

'If you wish,' she told me, 'climb aboard my carriage. I am about to order my echelon to carry on with its journey towards Volnovaha-Uzovo.' And in a half-whisper and half a smile on her lips she added, as if apologetically: 'You were quite right to say that it was too late for us to make for Gulyai-Polye. All of the routes leading to it are occupied by the Germans.'

However, I declined to fall back with Maria Nikiforova's detachment. I told her that I reckoned I would stay there for the time being, especially as Petrenko's detachment had decided to spend the night there. I hoped to see one of my comrades from Gulyai-Polye arrive during that time. Indeed, the first time I had been told that Gulyai-Polye had been delivered by treachery into the hands of the Germans, I had sent Aleksandr Lepechenko there with the specific task of personally explaining to the 'communards' what direction they should flee in, and had recommended him to flee along with them. As for comrades Gorev, Veretelnik, Marchenko, Polonski, Kalashnikov, Petrovski, Liouty, Sava Makhno, S. Shepel, M. Kalinichenko, P. Sokruta and others, he was to have urged them to clear out of Gulyai-Polye as quickly as possible and to make for the Red front, where they would find me.

During Petrenko's detachment's stopover at Tsarekonstantinovka station, I saw a number of comrades arrive who had stayed in Gulyai-Polye up until the arrival of German and Austro-Hungarian troops as marauders in advance of a detachment from the Ukrainian Central Rada. They gave me an account of all that had happened during the two days which had followed my

departure with tears in their eyes, they related the despicable treachery of our comrade Leon Schneider and told of the Jewish regiment, misled by the traitor's leadership.

They also told me of the entry of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and of the Central Rada's detachment's entry into our village and of how their agents, Gulyai-Polye citizens, sublieutenants in the pay of the Rada... A. Volokh, I. Volkov, L. Sahno-Prihodka (SR), Pidoyma and a number of others more insignificant and stupid, such as Ossip Solovey, V. Sharovski (an SR), the agronomist Dmitrenko, had made ready to welcome the executioners of the Revolution, Germans and Austro-Hungarians, in the hope of being able to show them by their deeds that they too knew how to strangle the Revolution and its best features.

These *nec plus ultra* Ukrainian patriots, 'the flower of the population', were ready to ape the example of the German and Austrian soldiery who, leaving behind in their country and prey to hunger and cold their fathers and mothers, wives and children, had come here to kill their fellows; and not content with supporting these criminals (conscious and otherwise) these destroyers of the revolutionary achievement, they sought to do even worse: they stood ready to set out in the van of these assassins and incendiaries to combat the toilers of the Ukraine, to drown them in blood, if only their lords and masters of the moment, come treacherously under cover of the socialist flag, would allow them to keep their sublieutenant's gold epaulettes and their title deeds to the land.

These champions of the occupation of revolutionary territory by enemy armies, these wild-eyed advocates of the toilers' extermination, returned to the counter-revolutionary bands, as they passed through the streets of Gulyai-Polye the machine-guns, some hundreds of rifles and our artillery pieces!

The commander of these bands thanked them for their 'loyalty'. These contemptible eulogists of the idea of occupation, just like all who had, as they had done, prepared the way for the counter-revolutionary regime, did not disguise their delight at this acknowledgement by the mighty.

What a burden of shame!

What thoughts of vengeance it sparked in the soul of revolutionaries! Vengeance on all who trample upon the enslaved, tormented people, crushed politically and socially!.

No more pity for the toilers' enemies! No more mercy for all who would venture to resist our revolutionary activity!

The remainder of my memoirs will demonstrate to the reader how events followed one upon the other at a ferocious rate.

<https://archive.elephant editions.net/library/nestor-makhno-the-russian-revolution-in-the-ukraine>

Translated by Paul Sharkey. Introduction by Alfredo M. Bonanno, translated by Jean Weir.

# To All Peasants and Workers of the Ukraine

Nestor Makhno

7 January 1920

*To be transmitted by telegraph, telephone, or post to all villages, townships, districts, and provinces of the Ukraine. To be read in village assemblies, factories, and workshops.*

Brother toilers! The Revolutionary, Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) was called into being as a protest against the oppression of workers and peasants by the bourgeois-landlord authorities on one side and the Bolshevik-Communist dictatorship on the other. Setting itself the goal to fight for the complete liberation of the toilers of the Ukraine from the yoke of this or that power and to create a *true soviet socialist order*, the Insurgent Army of Makhnovists has fought persistently on several fronts to achieve these objectives and at the present time to finish the struggle against Denikin's army, liberating district after district from every coercive power and every coercive organisation.

Many peasants and workers have raised the question: What will there be now? What is to be done? How shall we respond to the decrees of the evicted authorities? etc. To all such questions the final answer will be given by the All-Ukrainian Workers' and Peasants' Congress, which must meet at once, as soon as the workers and peasants are able to attend it. This congress will discuss and decide all urgent questions concerning worker and peasant life.

In view of the fact that such a congress will soon be convened, the Insurgent Army of Makhnovists deems it necessary to issue the following declaration concerning the questions of worker and peasant life:

1. All decrees of the Denikin (Voluntary) Army are hereby abolished. Those decrees of the Communist authorities which conflict with the interests of the peasants and workers are likewise abolished.

*Note:* In this connection, which of the decrees of the Communist authorities are harmful to the toilers must be decided by the toilers themselves in their village assemblies and in the factories and shops.

2. The land of the gentry, the church and other enemies of the toilers with all its livestock and equipment must be transferred to the peasants, who will live on it only by their own labour. The transfer will take place in organised manner, according to the decisions of peasant assemblies, which must take into account not only their own local interests but also common interests of the whole oppressed labouring peasantry.

3. The factories, workshops, mines, and other means of production are to become the possession of the working class as a whole, which through its trade unions will take all enterprises in

its own hands, resume production, and strive to link together the industry of the whole country in a single united organisation.

4. It is proposed that all organisations of workers and peasants begin to create free workers' and peasants' soviets. These soviets must consist only of toilers engaged in some form of labour that is necessary for the national economy. Representatives of political organisations have no place in workers' and peasants' soviets, for their participation will transform the latter into soviets of party deputies, which can only bring about the demise of the soviet order.

5. The existence of Chekas, party committees or similar coercive, authoritarian, and disciplinarian institutions is impermissible among peasants and workers.

6. Freedom of speech, press, assembly, trade unions and the like is an inalienable right of every worker, and any limitation of this right represents a counter-revolutionary act.

7. State militias, police and armies are hereby abolished. In their place people will organise their own self-defence units. Self-defence must be organised only by workers and peasants.

8. The workers' and peasants' soviets, the self-defence units of the workers and peasants, and the individual peasant and worker must not allow any counter-revolutionary manifestations by the *bourgeoisie* or military officers. Nor must they allow the emergence of banditry. Anyone convicted of counter-revolutionary acts or of banditry will be shot on the spot.

9. Soviet and Ukrainian money must be accepted along with all other kinds of money. Violators of this rule will be subject to revolutionary punishment.

10. The exchange of goods and products, until taken over by workers' and peasants' organisations, will remain free. But at the same time it is proposed that the exchange of products take place for the most part *between toilers*.

11. All individuals who attempt to hinder the distribution of this declaration will be regarded as counter-revolutionaries.

MILITARY REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND COMMAND STAFF OF THE REVOLUTIONARY INSURGENT ARMY OF THE UKRAINE (MAKHNOVISTS)

7 January 1920

Retrieved on 2016-10-28 from

<http://marxists.architecturez.net/reference/archive/makhno-nestor/works/1920/telegraph.htm>

Written: 7 January 1920; Source: EndPage.com.

# To the Young People

From the Insurgent Makhnovists

Nestor Makhno

June 1920

Why, comrades, are you sitting at home? Why are you not in our ranks?

Or are you waiting for the arrival of the commissars with punitive detachments to draft you by force? Don't fool yourselves that they won't find you, that you will hide, escape. The Bolshevik authority has already shown that it will stop at nothing: they will arrest your family and relatives, they will take hostages, if necessary, they will fire upon the entire village with artillery - and in some way or another, you and your comrades, who are presently still at liberty, will sooner or later be drafted by the government.

And then they will send you, with weapons in hand, to kill your brother peasants and workers - the revolutionary insurgent Makhnovists.

We, Makhnovist insurgents, are not sitting at home, although each one of us also has a family and relatives and loved ones from whom we do not wish to be separated. But we are revolutionaries. It is not possible for us to look on indifferently as the working people are once again thrown into slavery, as new despots lord it over us, unchecked, under the mask of the socialist-communists, under the banner of worker-peasant authority. Three years of revolution have clearly shown that every authority is counter-revolutionary, without exception, whether it be the authority of Bloody Nicholas or of the Bolshevik-Communists. We Makhnovists raise the banner of revolt for a total socialist revolution, against every authority, against every oppressor; we are fighting for the free Soviets of the working people.

Follow us, comrades! Let the fainthearted self-seeker and coward remain at home near someone's skirts - we do not need sissies. But you, honest peasants and workers, your place is with us, among the revolutionary insurgent Makhnovists. We will take no one by force. But remember: the Bolshevik government, through its own brutal violence to the Makhnovists, compels us also to merciless battle.

And so, decide, comrades! Drafted by the commissars, you will be sent against us, and we will be compelled to treat you as hostile and an enemy of the revolution. With us or against us - choose!

**Insurgent Makhnovists**

www.ditext.com: Peter Arshinov, History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918-1921. Online text  
retrieved on April 10, 2021, from RevoltLib.com.

# Anarchism and Our Times

Nestor Makhno

September 1925

Anarchism is not merely a doctrine that deals with the social aspect of human life, in the narrow meaning with which the term is invested in political dictionaries and, at meetings, by our propagandist speakers: anarchism is also the study of human life in general.

Over the course of the elaboration of its overall world picture, anarchism has set itself a very specific task: to encompass the world in its entirety, sweeping aside all manner of obstacles, present and yet to come, which might be posed by bourgeois capitalist science and technology, with the aim of providing humanity with the most exhaustive possible explanation of existence in this world and of making the best possible fist of all the problems which may confront it. This approach should help humanity to develop consciousness of the anarchism that is, as far as I know, naturally inherent in us to the extent that humanity is continually being faced with partial manifestations thereof.

It is only on the basis of the will of the individual that anarchist teachings can be embodied in real life and clear a path that will help humanity to banish all spirit of submission from its bosom.

Anarchism knows no bounds to its development.

Anarchism acknowledges no banks within which it might be confined and fixed.

Anarchism, like human existence generally, has no definitive formulas for its aspirations and objectives.

As I see it, the right of every person to unlimited freedom, as defined by the theoretical postulates of anarchism, are only a means by which anarchism can achieve its more or less complete expression, whilst continuing to develop. And only here anarchism becomes clear for each of us: having banished from humanity that spirit of submission that has been artificially instilled in it, anarchism thereafter becomes the leading idea for the human masses on their march towards the attainment of all their goals.

**Theoretically**, anarchism in our day is still regarded as weak, badly developed and even - some would say - often interpreted wrongly in many respects. However, its exponents - they say - have plenty to say about it: many are constantly prattling about it, militating actively and sometimes complaining of its lack of success (I imagine, in this last instance, that this attitude is prompted by the failure to devise, through research, the social wherewithal vital to anarchism if it is to gain a foothold in contemporary society...).

**In reality**, wherever human life is to be found, anarchism is alive. On the other hand, it becomes accessible to the individual only where it boasts propagandists and militants, who have honestly and entirely severed their connections with the slave mentality of our age, something, by the way, that brings savage persecution down upon their heads. Such militants aspire to serve their beliefs unselfishly, without fear of uncovering unsuspected aspects in the course of their development, the better to digest them as they proceed, if need be, and in this way they pave the way for the success of the anarchist spirit over the spirit of submission.

Two theses arise out of the above:

- the first is that anarchism assumes a variety expressions and forms, whilst retaining a perfect integrity in its essentials;
- the second is that anarchism is inherently revolutionary and can adopt only revolutionary modes of action in the struggle against its oppressors.

In the course of its revolutionary struggle, anarchism not merely overthrows governments and discards their laws, but also sets about the society that spawned their values, their "mores" and their "morality," which is what makes it increasingly known and understood by the oppressed sectors of humanity.

All of which inclines us to the firm belief that anarchism in our time can no longer remain walled up inside the narrow parameters of a marginal thinking to which only a few tiny groups operating in isolation subscribe. The natural influence of anarchism on the psyche of the human masses in struggle is all too apparent. But if the influence of anarchism is to be assimilated by the masses in a conscious fashion, anarchism must henceforth arm itself with new approaches and embark on the path of social action now, in our times.

Delo Truda, N°4, September 1925, pp. 7-8, Translated from Russian to French by Alexandre Skirda and from French to English by Paul Sharkey. English translation revised with reference to the Russian by the Nestor Makhno Archive. Text retrieved from RevoltLib.com on April 6, 2021.

# An Historic Injustice

Nestor Makhno

June 30, 1926

It's not the first time that the revolutionary Makhnovists have been accused of organizing pogroms in Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> At the moment, in the wake of the murder of Semyon Petlyura, leader and hero of semi-bourgeois Ukraine, this accusation is being renewed more aggressively and more obnoxiously than ever.

The Jewish community, and the Jewish socialists especially, should, in my opinion, consider this fact very seriously. It's even more important that the Jewish people as a whole concern themselves with this matter. Because it is only by doing so that they would be able without hesitation, without demeaning themselves, honestly name the true perpetrators of the pogroms that have caused the deaths of tens of thousands of people among the peaceful Jewish population of Ukraine. In this manner those men who consider themselves progressive would be forearmed against the danger of committing a gross injustice by formulating a shameful slander against the revolutionary insurgent peasants, the Makhnovists. If the Jewish socialists and political men generally were to take a serious look at these deceitful slanders, they would not allow to appear in the columns of the Jewish press lies as flagrant as those which I read in the article entitled: "Ten years in prison for the organizers of pogroms" (published in the newspaper "Pariser Haint" [Paris Today], June 13) and in the newspaper "Volkszeitung" [People's Daily] published in Poland (June 14). There one finds: "A Ukrainian court has condemned the two Karetnik brothers to death

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<sup>3</sup> Cherikover on Makhno's attitude to pogroms

'In his book, Voline quotes the conclusions of Cherikover, a specialist investigator of persecutions and pogroms against the Jews in the Ukraine:

"Makhno's attitude is not to be compared to that of the other armies which operated in Russia during the happenings of 1917-1921. On two points I can offer you absolutely formal assurances:

1. It cannot be gainsaid, that of all these armies, Red Army included, it was Makhno's army which behaved best toward the civilian population generally and the Jewish population in particular. I have plenty of irrefutable testimony to that. Compared with the rest, the proportion of justified complaints against the Makhnovist army is insignificant.

2. Let us not speak of pogroms supposedly organised or encouraged by Makhno himself. That is calumny or error. Nothing of the sort occurred.'

Source: *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's cossack* by Alexandre Skirda (p339) The quote from Cherikover can also be found on page 699 of Voline's *The unknown revolution*. The only significant difference is that the equivalent of the first line quoted above says 'But I am glad to be able to say with certainty that, on the whole, the behaviour of Makhno's army cannot be compared with that of the other armies which were operating in Russia during the events of 1917-21.' [KSL]

...<sup>4</sup> The elder was the favourite of the famous ataman Makhno, who appointed him commandant of Zaporozhye<sup>5</sup>. He was one of the perpetrators of the bloodiest pogroms of Ukraine ... ” etc. But all this is a tissue of lies.

The elder of the Karetnik brothers, Semyon, was shot by the Bolsheviks in November, 1920, for having refused to sign an order that was offered to him to sign without the knowledge of either myself or the Revolutionary Council of the Makhnovist insurgents. **This order directed the main army of the insurgents to lay down their arms before the Bolshevik Red Army.** Thus it's impossible that the Bolshevik court has passed judgment on him now, in 1926.

The two brothers Karetnik always fought honourably in the first ranks of the Makhnovist insurgents, side by side with working class Jews, of whom there were many in the revolutionary peasant army of the insurgents. Together they fought for liberty and the independent of all workers, regardless of nationality.

The elder, Semyon Karetnik, was my direct associate from the end of 1919; before that, he held various important command posts. And there is not a soul among the Ukrainian Jews who knew him who would call him a perpetrator of pogroms. (An exception, of course, would be those Bolsheviks who, in slandering the Makhnovists, are deliberately following the policy of their party.) On the contrary, Semyon was one of those who struggled against pogroms not only in words, but in deeds, exterminating antisemitic looters and assassins. It was in this capacity that his name was known not only among the insurgents, but well beyond—in the vast expanse of Ukraine.

In the future, the world will learn the story of the struggle against antisemitism and pogroms in Ukraine that was led by the Makhnovist insurgents. Then the workers will also learn of the role in this struggle of the two Karetnik brothers, the elder one especially, and they will tell their slanderers what I am telling them now: only an irresponsible bastard or a deliberate liar can treat Semyon Karetnik as a pogromist.

Retrieved on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from [www.katesharpleylibrary.net](http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net)

Published in *Le Libertaire*, August 27 1926, p.2. Translated by Malcolm Archibald.

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<sup>4</sup> The youngest brother was Khariton (born 1904), so he may have been too young to be active in the Makhnovist movement. Panteleimon was born in 1898 and held important posts in the Insurgent Army. It should be noted that although Makhno writes the family name as “Karetnik,” and it is so found in much of the literature, the correct version is “Karetnikov.” Panteleimon and Khariton were arrested in 1925 and charged with robbing a mill (stealing grain) in the fall of 1921 along with three other “band” members (including Panteleimon’s wife). Upon being found guilty in 1926, the two brothers were sentenced to “the highest measure of punishment.” As a result of an amnesty, this was later commuted to 10 years imprisonment for Panteleimon and six years for Khariton (because of his youth). In fact Panteleimon was released on parole in 1928. His wife did not have to serve time because as an illiterate with small children, she was not considered a danger to society. Panteleimon was shot in 1937. [MA]

<sup>5</sup> Region of Ukraine.

# A Few Words on the National Question in the Ukraine

Nestor Makhno

December 1928

In the wake of the abolition of czarist despotism at the time of the 1917 revolution, prospects of new, free relations between peoples hitherto in subjection beneath the violent yoke of the Russian State, appeared on the horizons of the world of Labor. The notion of complete self-determination, up to and including a complete break with the Russian State, thus emerged naturally among these peoples. Groups of every persuasion sprang up among the Ukrainian population by the dozen: each of them had its own outlook and interpreted the idea of self-determination according to its own factional interests. All in all, the toiling masses of the Ukraine did not identify with these groups and did not join them.

Over seven years have elapsed since, and the Ukrainian toilers' line on the notion of self-determination has developed and their understanding increased. Now they identified with it and they displayed this often in their life-style. Thus, for example, they asserted their rights to use their own language and their entitlement to their own culture, which had been regarded prior to the revolution as anathema. They also asserted their right to conform in their lives to their own way of life and specific customs. In the aim of building an independent Ukrainian State, certain statist gentlemen would dearly love to arrogate to themselves all natural manifestations of Ukrainian reality, against which the Bolsheviks, by the way, are powerless to fight, for all their omnipotence. However, these statist gentlemen cannot seem to carry the broad masses of toilers with them, much less mobilize them in this way for a struggle against the oppressive Bolshevik party. The healthy instincts of the Ukrainian toilers and their baleful life under the Bolshevik yoke has not made them oblivious of the State danger in general. For that reason, they shun the chauvinist trend and do not mix it up with their social aspirations, rather seeking their own road to emancipation.

There is food there for serious thought on the part of all Ukrainian revolutionaries and for libertarian communists in particular, if they aim after this to engage in consistent work among the Ukrainian toilers.

Such work, though, cannot be conducted along the same lines as in the years 1918-1920, for the reality in the country has altered a lot. Then, the Ukrainian laboring population, which had played such a significant part in crushing all of the bourgeoisie's mercenaries - Denikin, Petliura

and Wrangel - could never have dreamed that, at the far end of the revolution, it would find itself so ignominiously deceived and exploited by the Bolsheviks.

Those were the days when we were all fighting against the restoration of the czarist order. There was not enough time then to scrutinize and vet all the "blow-ins" showing up to join the struggle. Faith in the revolution overruled all second thoughts about the mettle of these "blow-ins" or the questions that might have been raised about them; should they be counted as friends or foes? At the time, the toilers were on the move against the counter-revolution, heedful only of those who showed up to share their front ranks in confronting death fearlessly in defense of the revolution.

Later, the psychology of the Ukrainian toilers changed a lot: they had had the time to familiarize themselves to saturation point with these "blow-ins" to their cause, and thereafter were more critical in their accounting of what they had won through the revolution, or at least what remains of that. Behind these "blow-ins" they recognize their outright enemies, even though these Ukrainianized themselves and wave the flag of socialism, for, in actuality, they watch them operate in such a way as to add to the exploitation of Labor. They are clear in their minds that it was this caste of socialists, voracious exploiters, that stripped them of all their revolutionary gains. In short, as far as they are concerned it is something akin to the Austro-German occupation camouflaged behind all manner of Bolshevik sleight of hand.

This disguised occupation prompts from the masses a certain chauvinist backlash directed against the "blow-ins". Not for nothing do these Bolshevik gentlemen govern the Ukraine from Moscow, hiding behind their Ukrainian cat's paws: it is the growing hatred from the Ukrainian masses that has commended this course to them. It is the very nature of the Bolshevik despotism that is driving the Ukrainian toilers to search for ways of overthrowing it and making progress towards a new and truly free society. The Bolsheviks are not resting on their laurels either and are striving to adapt at all costs to Ukrainian reality. In 1923, they ended up like lost sheep: since which they have modified their tactics and wasted no time in getting to grips with Ukrainian reality. Furthermore, they have wasted no time in associating the fate of Bolshevism with that of nationalism, and they have, in pursuance of this, added specific articles to the 'Constitution of the USSR', affording every component people of that Union full rights of self-determination, indeed of secession. All of which is, of course, mere show. How is this attitude of the Bolsheviks going to develop? The next few years will tell. Anarchists' approach to the reality of the Ukraine now should take due account of these new factors - the Ukrainian toilers' hatred for the "blow-ins" of nationalist Bolshevism. By our reckoning, their chief task today consists of explaining to the masses that the root of all evil is not some "blow-in" authorities, but all authority in general. The history of recent years will afford considerable weight to their argument, for the Ukraine has seen a parade of all manner of authorities and, when all is said and done, these have been as indistinguishable one from another as peas in a pod. We must demonstrate that a "blow-in" State power and an "independent" State power amount to just about equal in value and that the toilers have nothing to gain from either: they should focus all their attention elsewhere: on destroying the nests of the State apparatus and replacing these with worker and peasant bodies for social and economic self-direction.

In spite of everything, in broaching the national question, we should not overlook the latest developments in the Ukraine. Ukrainian is being spoken now, and by virtue of the new nationalist trend, outsiders who do not speak the local language are scarcely listened to. This is an ethnic thing that ought to be kept in the forefront of our minds. Whereas, up to now, anarchists have

enjoyed only a feeble audience among the Ukrainian peasantry, that was because they were concentrated above all in the towns and, what is more, did not use the national tongue of the Ukrainian countryside.

Ukrainian life is filled with all sorts of possibilities, especially the potential for a mass revolutionary movement. Anarchists have a great chance of influencing that movement, indeed becoming its mentors, provided only that they appreciate the diversity of real life and espouse a position to wage a single-minded, direct and declared fight against those forces hostile to the toilers which might have ensconced themselves there. That is a task that cannot be accomplished without a large and powerful Ukrainian anarchist organization. It is for Ukrainian anarchists to give that some serious thought, starting now.

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# **About the Platform**

Errico Malatesta and Nestor Makhno

1927–1930

## Errico Malatesta: A Project of Anarchist Organisation (1927)

I recently happened to come across a French pamphlet (in Italy today [1927], as is known, the non-fascist press cannot freely circulate), with the title *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Project)*.

This is a project for anarchist organisation published under the name of a 'Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad' and it seems to be directed particularly at Russian comrades. But it deals with questions of equal interest to all anarchists; and it is, clear, including the language in which it is written, that it seeks the support of comrades worldwide. In any case it is worth examining, for the Russians as for everyone, whether the proposal put forward is in keeping with anarchist principles and whether implementation would truly serve the cause of anarchism.

The intentions of the comrades are excellent. They rightly lament the fact that until now the anarchists have not had an influence on political and social events in proportion to the theoretical and practical value of their doctrines, nor to their numbers, courage and spirit of self-sacrifice — and believe that the main reason for this relative failure is the lack of a large, serious and active organisation.

And thus far I could more or less agree.

Organisation, which after all only means cooperation and solidarity in practice, is a natural condition, necessary to the running of society; and it is an unavoidable fact which involves everyone, whether in human society in general or in any grouping of people joined by a common aim.

As human beings cannot live in isolation, indeed could not really become human beings and satisfy their moral and material needs unless they were part of society and cooperated with their fellows, it is inevitable that those who lack the means, or a sufficiently developed awareness, to organise freely with those with whom they share common interests and sentiments, must submit to the organisations set up by others, who generally form the ruling class or group and whose aim is to exploit the labour of others to their own advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small number of the privileged has always been the outcome of the inability of the greater number of individuals to agree and to organise with other workers on production and enjoyment of rights and benefits and for defence against those who seek to exploit and oppress them.

Anarchism emerged as a response to this state of affairs, its basic principle being free organisation, set up and run according to the free agreement of its members without any kind of authority; that is, without anyone having the right to impose their will on others. And it is therefore obvious that anarchists should seek to apply to their personal and political lives this same principle upon which, they believe, the whole of human society should be based.

Judging by certain polemics it would seem that there are anarchists who spurn any form of organisation; but in fact the many, too many, discussions on this subject, even when obscured by questions of language or poisoned by personal issues, are concerned with the means and not the actual principle of organisation. Thus it happens that when those comrades who sound the most hostile to organisation want to really do something they organise just like the rest of us and often more effectively. The problem, I repeat, is entirely one of means.

Therefore I can only view with sympathy the initiative that our Russian comrades have taken, convinced as I am that a more general, more *united*, more enduring organisation than any that have so far been set up by anarchists — even if it did not manage to do away with all the mistakes

and weaknesses that are perhaps inevitable in a movement like ours — which struggles on in the midst of the incomprehension, indifference and even the hostility of the majority — would undoubtedly be an important element of strength and success, a powerful means of gaining support for our ideas.

I believe it is necessary above all and urgent for anarchists to come to terms with one another and organise as much and as well as possible in order to be able to influence the direction the mass of the people take in their struggle for change and emancipation.

Today the major force for social transformation is the labour movement (union movement) and on its direction will largely depend the course events take and the objectives of the next revolution. Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests the workers develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime. Then, when the conflict goes beyond compromise, revolution or reaction follows. The anarchists must recognise the usefulness and importance of the union movement; they must support its development and make it one of the levers in their action, doing all they can to ensure that, by cooperating with other forces for progress, it will open the way to a social revolution that brings to an end the class system, and to complete freedom, equality, peace and solidarity for everybody.

But it would be a great and a fatal mistake to believe, as many do, that the labour movement can and should, of its own volition, and by its very nature, lead to such a revolution. On the contrary, all movements based on material and immediate interests (and a big labour movement can do nothing else) if they lack the stimulus, the drive, the concerted effort of people of ideas, tend inevitably to adapt to circumstances, they foster a spirit of conservatism and fear of change in those who manage to obtain better working conditions, and often end up creating new and privileged classes, and serving to uphold and consolidate the system we would seek to destroy.

Hence there is an impelling need for specifically anarchist organisations which, both from within and outside the unions, struggle for the achievement of anarchism and seek to sterilise all the germs of degeneration and reaction.

But it is obvious that in order to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of cooperation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire.

Does the project under discussion satisfy these demands?

It seems to me that it does not. Instead of arousing in anarchists a greater desire for organisation, it seems deliberately designed to reinforce the prejudice of those comrades who believe that to organise means to submit to leaders and belong to an authoritarian, centralising body that suffocates any attempt at free initiative. And in fact it contains precisely those proposals that some, in the face of evident truths and despite our protests, insist on attributing to all anarchists who are described as organisers. Let us examine the Project.

First of all, it seems to me a mistake — and in any case impossible to realise — to believe that all anarchists can be grouped together in one 'General Union' — that is, in the words of the Project, In a *single*, active revolutionary body.

We anarchists can all say that we are of the same party, if by the word ‘party’ we mean all who are *on the same side*, that is, who share the same general aspirations and who, in one way or another, struggle for the same ends against common adversaries and enemies. But this does not mean it is possible — or even desirable — for all of us to be gathered into one specific association. There are too many differences of environment and conditions of struggle; too many possible ways of action to choose among, and also too many differences of temperament and personal incompatibilities for a *General Union*, if taken seriously, not to become, instead of a means for coordinating and reviewing the efforts of all, an obstacle to individual activity and perhaps also a cause of more bitter internal strife.

As an example, how could one organise in the same way and with the same group a public association set up to make propaganda and agitation, publicly and a secret society restricted by the political conditions of the country in which it operates to conceal from the enemy its plans, methods and members? How could the *educationalists*, who believe that propaganda and example suffice for the gradual transformation of individuals and thus of society, adopt the same tactics as the *revolutionaries*, who are convinced of the need to destroy by violence a status quo that is maintained by violence and to create, in the face of the violence of the oppressors, the necessary conditions for the free dissemination of propaganda and the practical application of the conquered ideals? And how to keep together some people who, for particular reasons, do not get on with; and respect one another and could never be equally good and useful militants for anarchism?

Besides, even the authors of the Project (*Platforme*) declare as ‘inept’ any idea of creating an organisation which gathers together the representatives of the different tendencies in anarchism. Such an organisation, they say, ‘incorporating heterogeneous elements, both on a theoretical and practical level, would be no more than a mechanical collection (assemblage) of individuals who conceive all questions concerning the anarchist movement from a different point of view and would inevitably break up as soon as they were put to the test of events and real life.’

That’s fine. But then, if they recognise the existence of different tendencies they will surely have to leave them the right to organise in their own fashion and work for anarchy in the way that seems best to them. Or will they claim the right to expel, to *excommunicate* from anarchism all those who do not accept their programme? Certainly they say they ‘want to assemble in a single organisation’ all the *sound elements* of the libertarian movement; and naturally they will tend to judge as *sound* only those who think as they do. But what will they do with the elements that are *not sound*?

Of course, among those who describe themselves as anarchists there are, as in any human groupings, elements of varying worth; and what is worse, there are some who spread ideas in the name of anarchism which have very little to do with anarchism. But how to avoid the problem? *Anarchist truth* cannot and must not become the monopoly of one individual or committee; nor can it depend on the decisions of real or fictitious majorities. All that is necessary — and sufficient — is for everyone to have and to exercise the widest freedom of criticism and for each one of us to maintain their own ideas and choose for themselves their own comrades. In the last resort the facts will decide who was right.

Let us therefore put aside the idea of bringing together *all* anarchists into a single organisation and look at this *General Union* which the Russians propose to us for what it really is — namely the Union of a particular fraction of anarchists; and let us see whether the organisational method

proposed conforms with anarchist methods and principles and if it could thereby help to bring about the triumph of anarchism.

Once again, it seems to me that it cannot.

I am not doubting the sincerity of the anarchist proposals of those Russian comrades. They want to bring about anarchist communism and are seeking the means of doing so as quickly as possible. But it is not enough to want something; one also has to adopt suitable means; to get to a certain place one must take the right path or end up somewhere else. Their organisation, being typically authoritarian, far from helping to bring about the victory of anarchist communism, to which they aspire, could only falsify the anarchist spirit and lead to consequences that go against their intentions.

In fact, their *General Union* appears to consist of so many partial organisations with *secretariats* which *ideologically* direct the political and technical work; and to coordinate the activities of all the member organisations there is a *Union Executive Committee* whose task is to carry out the decisions of the Union and to oversee the 'ideological and organisational conduct of the organisations in conformity with the ideology and general strategy of the Union.'

Is this anarchist? This, in my view, is a government and a church. True, there are no police or bayonets, no faithful flock to accept the dictated *ideology*; but this only means that their government would be an impotent and impossible government and their church a nursery for heresies and schisms. The spirit, the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist.

Listen if this is not true.

'The executive organ of the general libertarian movement — the anarchist Union — will introduce into its ranks the principle of collective responsibility; the whole Union will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member; and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'

And following this, which is the absolute negation of any individual independence and freedom of initiative and action, the proponents, remembering that they are anarchists, call themselves federalists and thunder against centralisation, 'the inevitable results of which,' they say, 'are the enslavement and mechanisation of the life of society and of the parties.'

But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?

Moreover, the authors of the Project say that it is the 'Union' which proposes and disposes. But when they refer to the wishes of the Union do they perhaps also refer to the wishes of all the members? If so, for the Union to function it would need everyone always to have the same opinion on all questions. So if it is normal that everyone should be in agreement on the general

and fundamental principles, because otherwise they would not be and remain united, it cannot be assumed that thinking beings will all and always be of the same opinion on what needs to be done in the different circumstance and on the choice of persons to whom to entrust executive and directional responsibilities.

In reality – as it emerges from the text of the Project itself – the will of the Union can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the *Executive Committee* and decide on all the important questions. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups, and these representatives would decide on what to do, as ever by a majority of votes. So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by the majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority.

Furthermore it should be pointed out that, given the conditions in which anarchists live and struggle, their congresses are even less truly representative than the bourgeois parliaments. And their control over the executive bodies, if these have authoritarian powers, is rarely opportune and effective. In practice anarchist congresses are attended by whoever wishes and can, whoever has enough money and who has not been prevented by police measures. There are as many present who represent only themselves or a small number of friends as there are those truly representing the opinions and desires of a large collective. And unless precautions are taken against possible traitors and spies – indeed, because of the need for those very precautions – it is impossible to make a serious check on the representatives and the value of their mandate.

In any case this all comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism.

It is well known that anarchists do not accept majority government (*democracy*), any more than they accept government by the few (*aristocracy*, *oligarchy*, or dictatorship by one class or party) nor that of one individual (*autocracy*, *monarchy* or personal dictatorship).

Thousands of times anarchists have criticised so-called majority government, which anyway in practise always leads to domination by a small minority.

Do we need to repeat all this yet again for our Russian comrades?

Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many. And usually, in the interests of living peacefully together and under conditions of equality, it is necessary for everyone to be motivated by a spirit of concord, tolerance and compromise. But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. This is an ideal which, perhaps, in daily life in general, is difficult to attain in entirety, but it is a fact that in every human grouping anarchy is that much nearer where agreement between majority and minority is free and spontaneous and exempt from any imposition that does not derive from the natural order of things.

So if anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern human society in general – in which individuals are nonetheless constrained to accept certain restrictions, since they cannot isolate themselves without renouncing the conditions of human life – and if they want everything to be done by the free agreement of all, how is it possible for them to adopt the idea of government by majority in their essentially free and voluntary associations and begin to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?

It is understandable that non-anarchists would find Anarchy, defined as a free organisation without the rule of the majority over the minority, or vice versa, an unrealisable utopia, or one realisable only in a distant future; but it is inconceivable that anyone who professes to anarchist ideas and wants to make Anarchy, or at least seriously approach its realisation — today rather than tomorrow — should disown the basic principles of anarchism in the very act of proposing to fight for its victory.

In my view, an anarchist organisation must be founded on a very different basis from the one proposed by those Russian comrades.

Full autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it useful to unite in cooperating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective. Thus congresses of an anarchist organisation, though suffering as representative bodies from all the above-mentioned imperfections, are free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal relationships among the most active comrades, to coordinate and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means of taking action, to acquaint all on the situation in the various regions and the action most urgently needed in each; to formulate the various opinions current among the anarchists and draw up some kind of statistics from them — and their decisions are not obligatory rules but suggestions, recommendations, proposals to be submitted to all involved, and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them, and for as long as they accept them.

The administrative bodies which they nominate — Correspondence Commission, etc. — have no executive powers, have no directive powers, unless on behalf of those who ask for and approve such initiatives, and have no authority to impose their own views — which they can certainly maintain and propagate as groups of comrades, but cannot present as the official opinion of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals which groups and individuals communicate to them; and they serve — for those who require such a service — to facilitate relations between the groups and cooperation between those who agree on the various initiatives. Whoever wants to is free to correspond with whomsoever he wishes, or to use the services of other committees nominated by special groups.

In an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others. In any case a given organisation lasts for as long as the reasons for union remain greater than the reasons for dissent. When they are no longer so, then the organisation is dissolved and makes way for other, more homogeneous groups.

Clearly, the duration, the permanence of an organisation depends on how successful it has been in the long struggle we must wage, and it is natural that any institution instinctively seeks to last indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the consequence of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continual

changes of circumstances. When it is no longer able to accomplish a useful task it is better that it should die.

Those Russian comrades will perhaps find that an organisation like the one I propose and similar to the ones that have existed, more or less satisfactorily at various times, is not very efficient.

I understand. Those comrades are obsessed with the success of the Bolsheviks in their country and, like the Bolsheviks, would like to gather the anarchists together in a sort of disciplined army which, under the ideological and practical direction of a few leaders, would march solidly to the attack of the existing regimes, and after having won a material victory would direct the constitution of a new society. And perhaps it is true that under such a system, were it possible that anarchists would involve themselves in it, and if the leaders were men of imagination, our material effectiveness would be greater. But with what results? Would what happened to socialism and communism in Russia not happen to anarchism?

Those comrades are anxious for success as we are too. But to live and to succeed we don't have to repudiate the reasons for living and alter the character of the victory to come.

We want to fight and win, but as anarchists — for Anarchy.

Malatesta  
*Il Risveglio* (Geneva),  
October 1927

## Nestor Makhno: About the 'Platform' (1928)

Dear Comrade Malatesta,

I have read your response to the project for an 'Organisational Platform of a General Union of Anarchists,' a project published by the group of Russian anarchists abroad.

My impression is that either you have misunderstood the project for the 'Platform' or your refusal to recognise collective responsibility in revolutionary action and the directional function that the anarchist forces must take up, stems from a deep conviction about anarchism that leads you to disregard that principle of responsibility.

Yet, it is a fundamental principle, which guides each one of us in our way of understanding the anarchist idea, in our determination that it should penetrate to the masses, in its spirit of sacrifice. It is thanks to this that a man can choose the revolutionary way and ignore others. Without it no revolutionary could have the necessary strength or will or intelligence to bear the spectacle of social misery, and even less fight against it. It is through the inspiration of collective responsibility that the revolutionaries of all epochs and all schools have united their forces; it is upon this that they based their hope that their partial revolts — revolts which opened the path for the oppressed — were not in vain, that the exploited would understand their aspirations, would extract from them the applications suitable for the time and would use them to find new paths toward their emancipation.

You yourself, dear Malatesta, recognise the individual responsibility of the anarchist revolutionary. And what is more, you have lent your support to it throughout your life as a militant. At least that is how I have understood your writings on anarchism. But you deny the necessity and usefulness of collective responsibility as regards the tendencies and actions of the anarchist movement as a whole. Collective responsibility alarms you; so you reject it.

For myself, who has acquired the habit of fully facing up to the realities of our movement, your denial of collective responsibility strikes me not only as without basis but dangerous for the social revolution, in which you would do well to take account of experience when it comes to fighting a decisive battle against all our enemies at once. Now my experience of the revolutionary battles of the past leads me to believe that no matter what the order of revolutionary events may be, one needs to give out serious directives, both ideological and tactical. This means that only a collective spirit, sound and devoted to anarchism, could express the requirements of the moment, through a collectively responsible will. None of us has the right to dodge that element of responsibility. On the contrary, if it has been until now overlooked among the ranks of the anarchists, it needs now to become, for us, communist anarchists, an article of our theoretical and practical programme.

Only the collective spirit of its militants and their collective responsibility will allow modern anarchism to eliminate from its circles the idea, historically false, that anarchism cannot be a guide — either ideologically or in practice — for the mass of workers in a revolutionary period and therefore could not have overall responsibility.

I will not, in this letter, dwell on the other parts of your article against the 'Platform' project, such as the part where you see 'a church and an authority without police.' I will express only my surprise to see you use such an argument in the course of your criticism. I have given much thought to it and cannot accept your opinion.

No, you are not right. And because I am not in agreement with your confutation, using arguments that are too facile, I believe I am entitled to ask you:

1. Should anarchism take some responsibility in the struggle of the workers against their oppressors, capitalism, and its servant the State? If not, can you say why? If yes, must the anarchists work towards allowing their movement to exert influence on the same basis as the existing social order?
2. Can anarchism, in the state of disorganisation in which it finds itself at the moment, exert any influence, ideological and practical, on social affairs and the struggle of the working class?
3. What are the means that anarchism should adopt outside the revolution and what are the means of which it can dispose to prove and affirm its constructive concepts?
4. Does anarchism need its own permanent organisations, closely tied among themselves by unity of goal and action to attain its ends?
5. What do the anarchists mean by *institutions to be established* with a view to guaranteeing the free development of society?
6. Can anarchism, in the communist society it conceives, do without social institutions? If yes, by what means? If no, which should it recognise and use and with what names bring them into being? Should the anarchists take on a leading function, therefore one of responsibility, or should they limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries?

Your reply, dear Malatesta, would be of great importance to me for two reasons. It would allow me better to understand your way of seeing things as regards the questions of organising

the anarchist forces and the movement in general. And — let us be frank — your opinion is immediately accepted by most anarchists and sympathisers without any discussion, as that of an experienced militant who has remained all his life firmly faithful to his libertarian ideal. It therefore depends to a certain extent on your attitude whether a full study of the urgent questions which this epoch poses to our movement will be undertaken, and therefore whether its development will be slowed down or take a new leap forward. By remaining in the stagnation of the past and present our movement will gain nothing. On the contrary, it is vital that in view of the events that loom before us it should have every chance to carry out its functions.

I set great store by your reply.

1928  
with revolutionary greetings  
Nestor Makhno

## **Errico Malatesta: In reply to *About the Platform* (1929)**

Dear Comrade

I have finally seen the letter you sent me more than a year ago, about my criticism of the Project for organising a General Union of anarchists, published by a group of Russian anarchists abroad and known in our movement by the name of 'Platform.'

Knowing my situation as you do, you will certainly have understood why I did not reply.

I cannot take part as I would like in discussion of the questions which interest us most, because censorship prevents me from receiving either the publications that are considered subversive or the letters which deal with political and social topics, and only after long intervals and by fortunate chance do I hear the dying echo of what the comrades say and do. Thus, I knew that the 'Platform' and my criticism of it had been widely discussed, but I knew little or nothing about what had been said; and your letter is the first written document on the subject that I have managed to see.

If we could correspond freely, I would ask you, before entering into the discussion, to clarify your views which, perhaps owing to an imperfect translation of the Russian into French, seem to me to be in part somewhat obscure. But things being as they are, I will reply to what I have understood, and hope that I shall then be able to see your response.

You are surprised that I do not accept the principle of collective responsibility, which you believe to be a fundamental principle that guides, and must guide the revolutionaries of the past, present and future.

For my part, I wonder what that notion of collective responsibility can ever mean from the lips of an anarchist.

I know that the military are in the habit of decimating corps of rebellious soldiers or soldiers who have behaved badly in the face of the enemy by shooting at them indiscriminately. I know that the army chiefs have no scruples about destroying villages or cities and massacring an entire population, including children, because someone attempted to put up a resistance to invasion. I know that throughout the ages governments have in various ways threatened with and applied the system of collective responsibility to put a brake on the rebels, demand taxes, etc. And I understand that this could be an effective means of intimidation and oppression.

But how can people who fight for liberty and justice talk of collective responsibility when they can only be concerned with moral responsibility, whether or not material sanctions follow?!!!

If, for example, in a conflict with an armed enemy force the man beside me acts as a coward, he may do harm to me and to everyone, but the shame can only be his for lacking the courage to sustain the role he took upon himself. If in a conspiracy a co-conspirator betrays and sends his companions to prison, are the betrayed the ones responsible for the betrayal?

The 'Platform' said: 'The whole Union is responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'

Can this be reconciled with the principles of autonomy and free initiative which the anarchists profess? I answered then: 'If the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they see fit? How can it be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Thus, the Union and through it the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything before having obtained the go-ahead, permission from the committee. And then, can an individual accept responsibility for the action of a collectivity before knowing what the latter will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves?'

Certainly I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and cooperates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to coordinate his actions with those of his fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made — except when wishing sincerely to leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make cooperation impossible or inappropriate. Just as I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.

Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among the members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts, in my view, to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached.

The really important question that you raise in your letter concerns the function (*le rôle*) of the anarchists in the social movement and the way they mean to carry it out. This is a matter of basics, of the *raison d'être* of anarchism and one needs to be quite clear as to what one means.

You ask if the anarchists should (in the revolutionary movement and communistic organisation of society) assume a directional and therefore responsible role, or limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries.

Your question leaves me perplexed, because it lacks precision. It is possible to direct through advice and example, leaving the people — provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves — to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods.

In which way would you want to direct?

We are anarchists because we believe that government (any government) is an evil, and that it is not possible to gain liberty, solidarity and justice without liberty. We cannot therefore as-

pire to government and we must do everything possible to prevent others — classes, parties or individuals — from taking power and becoming governments.

The responsibility of the leaders, a notion by which it seems to me that you want to guarantee that the public are protected from their abuses and errors, means nothing to me. Those in power are not truly responsible except when faced with a revolution, and we cannot make the revolution every day, and generally it is only made after the government has already done all the evil it can.

You will understand that I am far from thinking that the anarchists should be satisfied with being the simple auxiliaries of other revolutionaries who, not being anarchists, naturally aspire to become the government.

On the contrary, I believe that we, anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way.

Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and coordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps unorganisable, masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future.

And then, in the revolution, we must take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage the workers to take possession of the means of production (land, mines, factories and workshops, means of transport, etc.) and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of consumer goods, and at the same time supply products for trade between communes and regions and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public. We must, in all ways possible and according to local circumstances and opportunities, promote action by the workers' associations, the cooperatives, the voluntary groups — to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless. And where we do not find sufficient consensus among the people and cannot prevent the re-establishment of the State with its authoritarian institutions and its coercive bodies, we must refuse to take part or to recognise it, rebelling against its impositions and demanding full autonomy for ourselves and for all the dissident minorities. In other words, we must remain in an actual or potential state of rebellion and, unable to win in the present, must at least prepare for the future.

Is this what you too mean by the part the anarchists should take in the preparation and carrying out of the revolution?

From what I know of you and your work I am inclined to believe that you do.

But, when I see that in the Union that you support there is an Executive Committee to give ideological and organisational direction to the association I am assailed by the doubt that you would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme of the revolution.

If this is so we are poles apart.

Your organisation, or your managerial organs, may be composed of anarchists but they would only become nothing other than a government. Believing, in completely good faith, that they are necessary to the triumph of the revolution, they would, as a priority, make sure that they were well placed enough and strong enough to impose their will. They would therefore create armed corps for material defence and a bureaucracy for carrying out their commands and in the process they would paralyse the popular movement and kill the revolution.

That is what, I believe, has happened to the Bolsheviks.

There it is. I believe that the important thing is not the victory of our plans, our projects, our utopias, which in any case need the confirmation of experience and can be modified by experience, developed and adapted to the real moral and material conditions of the age and place. What matters most is that the people, men and women lose the sheeplike instincts and habits which thousands of years of slavery have instilled in them, and learn to think and act freely. And it is to this great work of moral liberation that the anarchists must specially dedicate themselves.

I thank you for the attention you have given to my letter and, in the hope of hearing from you further, send you my cordial greetings.

Risveglio (Geneva),  
December 1929

## Nestor Makhno: A Second Letter to Malatesta (1930)

Dear comrade,

I waited to read a Russian translation of your letter before replying to you in turn. In your letter you say that before getting into an argument, something I might say I had not thought to do, you would like me to set out my ideas on anarchism. I will therefore explain these ideas and, at the same time, the causes to which I attribute the weakness of our movement.

As any anarchist, I reject authority in general, I am an adversary of all organization based on centralism, I recognize neither the State nor its legislative apparatus, I am a convinced enemy of bourgeois democracy and parliamentarianism – considering this social form to be an obstacle to the liberation of the workers – in a word, I rise up against any regime based on the exploitation of the workers.

So, anarchism for me is a revolutionary social doctrine that must inspire the exploited and oppressed. However, in my opinion, anarchism does not at present possess all the means it requires to carry out even one social action; hence the swamp in which we find ourselves. And we will not be able to remedy the situation by remaining as we are now.

We can understand as much as we like; as far as I am concerned, I believe that anarchists must not be afraid of abandoning their traditional opinions when drawing the logical conclusions that derive from the thinking of our theoreticians. For example, one question arises. Does anarchism – and consequently the mass of revolutionary workers – need to envisage permanent organizations that can guarantee the useful social functions that the State currently takes upon itself, organizations that must be a tool with which practical policies consistent with the anarchist ideal can be established? Or is this the role of the workers' syndicates and agricultural cooperatives or of others that, in their current form, are ideologically influenced by the sort of anarchist action groups that exist today?

I am inclined to believe that once this primordial question has been resolved by anarchists, other problems of equal importance will face our movement.

In particular, anarchists must fully grasp what Kropotkin intended with the expression “common law social institution” in order to be able to determine, concretely and in a manner adequate to our times, the nature of these institutions whose relationship with anarchism has no need to be proved.

These deductions will be of the utmost importance, not only for the revolutionary masses in general, but also for anarchists in particular, as let us not forget that 90% of us have never considered these questions; since neither Malatesta nor Faure nor any of our old comrades has dealt with these problems and say nothing about the deplorable state of our movement, these comrades are left to deduce that everything is fine and that anarchists are ready to play their indispensable destructive and constructive role in the revolution of tomorrow. However, the reality is entirely different: year after year our movement loses more and more influence among the workers and, consequently, it gets weaker. It is true that certain theoreticians “in our Russian circles in particular say that anarchism’s strength lies in its weakness, and its weakness in its strength,” so there is no need to worry if anarchist organizations lose their influence... But on closer examination, this statement is seen to be entirely stupid, it is simply an evasive formula designed to mollify the chatterboxes when it comes to explaining the real state of anarchism.

I believe that a truly social movement, such as I conceive the anarchist movement to be, cannot have positive policies until such times as it has given itself with relatively stable organizational forms that can provide the various means that are required for the struggle against the different authoritarian social systems. It is the absence of these means that results in anarchist action – above all in the revolutionary period – degenerating into a sort of local individualism all because, in declaring themselves to be the enemies of “all constitutions,” anarchists have in general seen the wide masses move away from them, as they inspire no hope of any sort of practical achievement.

In order to struggle and win, we need tactics whose nature must be expressed in a programme of practical action. Only when anarchists have such a programme will they be able to rally the exploited masses around them and prepare them for the great revolutionary battle with an equally great chance to achieve a radical social transformation.

But, let me repeat, such a test cannot be attempted without a permanent organization. Believing that today’s propaganda groups will suffice for this revolutionary task is an illusion. In order for any social organization to play a role, it must be known by the popular masses before the revolutionary process begins its course.

So then, instead of spending their time rejecting left, right and centre, I believe that anarchists would be better occupied getting to grips with what they do want and proposing something realistic to the workers, in place of all the things they reject.

Then, and only then, will anarchists be able to expect with good reason to fill the role that they would take upon themselves, that is to say the “vigilant guardians of liberty against the power and against the tyranny of the majority, should it arise.”

Unfortunately, as things stand anarchism is strong only in its philosophy. It lacks practical means. It is unable to manifest itself completely, even in times of revolution, and those spontaneous movements with an anarchist spirit that do appear, seem to the eyes of the wide masses to be merely desperate attempts. And that only goes towards making anarchism’s tragic state even worse.

You ask if the way I conceive the role of anarchists before and during the revolution is the same as your view, as set out in your reply. By way of answer, I would say that I am in total agreement with you as regards the role to be played, but I believe that such a role can only be played successfully when our Party is ideologically homogeneous and unified from the point of view of tactics, something which is not the case at present. Experience teaches us that anarchist action on a wide scale will only achieve its goals if it possesses a well-defined organizational base, inspired and guided by the principle of the collective responsibility of its militants.

“How do you wish to guide the masses?” you ask. In reply, I would say that, during the course of events, every social movement, especially every revolutionary movement of the wide popular masses, is required to formulate certain proposals designed to help the intended goal be achieved. The mass is too heterogeneous to be able to do this. Only ideological groups with clearly-defined policies are capable of driving this process, particularly towards the beginning of the revolution. Only they will be able to throw enough light on events and clearly define the unconscious desires of the masses, and setting an example through actions and words. It is for this reason that our Party must, in my opinion, make clear its political unity and organizational character. In the domain of practical achievements, the autonomous anarchist groups must be able to face up to every new situation that presents itself, in establishing the problems to be resolved and the responses to make without hesitation and without altering the goals and the spirit of anarchism.

With fraternal greetings,  
Nestor Makhno.  
*Le Libertaire*, 9 August 1930

Translated from the French by Nestor McNab.

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# Over the fresh grave of comrade N. Rogdaev

(from a report made to comrades on January 21 1933)

Nestor Makhno

January 21, 1933

Comrades, before I share with you my memories of Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev, I shall allow myself to digress for a minute and say a few words about our heavy losses generally in the last 12 to 15 years.

It's painful to dwell on this subject – it's almost impossible not to succumb to overwhelming emotions of grief, of deep pain and sorrow – because of the deaths of a whole series of renowned and steadfast comrades who were totally dedicated to our movement. It's difficult to speak about this and even more difficult to see it happening and be helpless to do anything about it.

As you are all well aware, only a week has passed since we buried an old, and for all of us, dear and unforgettable comrade – Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit<sup>6</sup>, also known in our revolutionary press under the pseudonyms Maria Korn and Isidin. Standing at the grave of this comrade, most of us I'm sure felt like orphans without her; for most of us are well aware of what we have lost in this comrade we buried. We respected her, or at least most of us did<sup>7</sup>, not only as a comrade and a friend but as one of the pioneers of anarchist revolutionary doctrine who, along with Kropotkin, Élisée Reclus, Cherkezov<sup>8</sup>, and others, developed and propagated that doctrine over the last 35 years.

But – I repeat – over the last 12 to 15 years we have been hit by a whole series of terrible physical and moral blows of the same type. It's almost as if some sort of dark cloud hovers over the ranks of the Russian anarchist movement and plucks from our midst our best practical and

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit (1858-1933) was a close associate of Peter Kropotkin for many years, in fact his closest associate during the period 1897-1917, and like her mentor combined serious scientific work (she was a professor of biology at the Sorbonne) with developing and publicizing anarchist ideas. She helped Makhno with the preparation of his memoirs and also assisted him financially, despite expressing strong disagreement in the anarchist press with the Platform, the program developed by Makhno and Peter Arshinov in the 1920's based on their experience of the Russian Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> At this point in his life Makhno was not on good terms with many anarchists, having engaged in sharp polemics on behalf of the Platform. Politically he was rather isolated, as his attempts to reconstruct the anarchist movement had been rebuffed and his main collaborator, Peter Arshinov (1887-1937), had apparently defected to the Bolsheviks. In the past he had always written warmly about Arshinov, but in this essay one senses a certain peevish tone.

<sup>8</sup> Varlaam Cherkezov (1846-1925) was a Georgian anarchist of aristocratic origins. As well as being a revolutionary activist he devoted his considerable literary talents to libertarian critiques of social democracy.

theoretical human resources. We experience this and we suffer – we suffer much more than any of our comrades of other countries.

At the moment our movement was locked in a life-and-death struggle to save the Russian Revolution, we lost P. A. Kropotkin and one of the outstanding popularizers of syndicalism and someone renowned for his polemics with the foes of anarchism – Comrade Gogelia<sup>9</sup>. And around 1925 we lost Comrade Cherkezov, in 1926 we lost Karelina<sup>10</sup>, in 1931 we lost Comrade Raevsky<sup>11</sup>, and in 1932 we lost Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev<sup>12</sup> who had been exiled by the Bolsheviks. And at the beginning of the current year, a year fraught with omens of political and social catastrophes, we lost Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit-Korn-Isidin.

All these people were nourished on the soil of Russian revolutionary rebelliousness and developed into titans of anarchism – both as activists and theoreticians – not only in the Russian but also in the international anarchist movement. We could take each one of them and say many fine things and draw valuable lessons, and that applies not only to the younger generation but also to those of us who see ourselves as the most senior and experienced guardians of our movement. For despite the teachings of our movement, we're inclined to say – irresponsibly, without blushing or feeling ashamed: "We don't acknowledge individuals, we're against the cult of personality on principle..."

We, the Russian anarchists, could sort of reconcile ourselves to the passing of Kropotkin, Cherkezov, and Karelina, since their deaths were almost natural: their advanced age drained their physical strength, removing them from us and our movement and warning both them and us of their impending deaths. Nevertheless we can't possibly reconcile ourselves with the deaths of the other comrades mentioned above. In particular, all (or almost all) of us present here cannot accept the premature, completely unexpected – I would even say incomprehensible – death of our comrade and friend Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit<sup>13</sup>. But let's not blame the dead. And now it has fallen to me to speak at this meeting about Nikolai Rogdaev. I'm only mentioning Maria Isidorovna because her death has cast a shadow over our meeting. We are gathered here to honour the memory of Comrades Nikolai Rogdaev and Maria Goldsmit and I believe a tribute to Maria Isidorovna will be delivered by another comrade. I have been personally entrusted with speaking about Com-

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<sup>9</sup> Georgi Gogelia (1878-1924) was a Georgian anarcho-communist who was attracted to anarchism while studying abroad. A prolific writer and editor, his revolutionary activities were hampered by chronic tuberculosis.

<sup>10</sup> Apollon Karelina (1863-1926) studied to be a lawyer before embarking on a long march through the Russian revolutionary Left, becoming an anarcho-communist in 1911. During the Russian Revolution he occupied important government positions thanks to his espousal of "Soviet anarchism" which advocated collaboration with the Bolsheviks. In later years, unable to pursue political activities in Russia, he contributed articles to the same foreign anarchist periodicals which published Makhno's writings.

<sup>11</sup> Maxim Raevsky (188? -1931) was a Russian anarchist who became an anarcho-syndicalist after studying abroad. He edited anarcho-syndicalist periodicals in France and the United States before returning to Russia in 1917. He supported the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, but later organized an underground anarchist youth group. His anarchist activities were not as dangerous to him in the Soviet Union as his supposed friendly relations with Trotsky.

<sup>12</sup> Nikolai Rogdaev (1880-1932) died in Tashkent but the exact date of his death remains unknown. According to one tradition he was stricken with a heart attack in a street named after Sacco and Vanzetti. His real name was Nikolai Ignatevich Musil, and he came from a family of Czechs who had emigrated to Russia.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Goldsmit took her own life on January 11 1933. She was suffering from depression brought about by the death of her mother (also a revolutionary) only two days earlier after a long and devastating illness.

rade Rogdaev and I welcome the opportunity of making this report to you, comrades, about this indefatigable and distinguished revolutionary-anarchist fighter of underground Russia.

What sort of person was Comrade Rogdaev?

Nikolai Rogdaev was born into a family of the intelligentsia in Viazma province. From an early age he was attracted to the ideas of Narodnaya Volya [People's Freedom] and was persecuted by the satraps of autocratic Russia. At the beginning of the 20th century he went abroad, where he met P. A. Kropotkin, É. Reclus, and Maria Korn (then still young and not yet active as an anarchist). His encounters with these comrades, as well as the fact he was already fluent in two foreign languages, helped him to a broader understanding of the ideas of anarchism; previously he was only familiar with the Bakunin type of insurrectionary Russian anarchism of the 1870's and 1880's. From Western Europe, Rogdaev made his way to Galicia. Here, in the cities of Stanislavov [now Ivano-Frankivsk] and Lviv, he made contact with young revolutionary anarchists, and created a small group of anarcho-communists (7-10 persons). With the help of this group he obtained documents which allowed him to return illegally to Russia at the end of 1902.

On his way north towards his own native region, he stopped to visit one of his acquaintances from Paris and Geneva – a teacher from the city of Briansk in Orlov Province. With the help of friends he was able to create an anarcho-communist group in Briansk. He ended up spending a lot of time in Briansk because he became absorbed in propaganda work among the workers and among the intelligentsia. But as soon as the group expanded and developed its own activity in the areas of propaganda work and study circles, it attracted the attention of the police. The police arrested one of the study circles and were on the trail of Rogdaev. He fled from Briansk to the city of Nezhin in Chernigov Province. In Nezhin Rogdaev met some people he knew from Briansk who were also on the run from the police but who had family connections in Nezhin. At the request of these friends Rogdaev remained in Nezhin and helped create another anarcho-communist group.

A number of excellent working class propagandists came out of this Nezhin group – personally taught by Rogadev (in Briansk and Nezhin he was known as "the teacher"). By means of activists from these two cities anarchism was introduced into the Briansk engineering works<sup>14</sup> in the city of Yekaterinoslav.

In the summer of 1903 Nikolai Rogdaev was charged by his comrades with the mission of going abroad again to set up a network which could transmit a steady supply of anarchist literature and weapons. Upon crossing the Russian border, Rogdaev met with the members of his first group in Lviv. He learned that this group had mushroomed and had created small militant anarcho-communist groups in a number of Galician cities. They had also established close relations with a group of Austrian anarcho-communists in Vienna. Rogdaev conceived the idea of unifying all these groups into a single organization. But after their first conference he was convinced that "the Slavic and German temperaments are not compatible," and rejected his own notion. But he visited Vienna and the Viennese comrades and ended up adopting some of their practices while passing on some of his own. From there he travelled on to Geneva, Paris, Brussels, and London. Here he again met with veteran anarchists and collected left-wing literature, although regrettably not enough of it was anarchist, which he sent through his Galician comrades

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<sup>14</sup> The Briansk Engineering Works in Yekaterinoslav was a steel rolling mill started in the 1880's by entrepreneurs from the Russian city of Briansk. By the early 1900's it employed as many as 10,000 workers. The plant still exists.

to Russia. He smuggled weapons himself to Nezhin. However this time he didn't tarry in Nezhin. He had his sights set on Yekaterinoslav where his comrades from Nezhin and Briansk were in great need of a good anarchist-propagandist. Thus the indefatigable revolutionary fighter Nikolai Rogdaev made tracks for Yekaterinoslav. In this city among the workers of the Briansk steel plant Rogdaev soon made his mark as a revolutionary-anarchist propagandist, organizing the first Yekaterinoslav anarcho-communist group from such self-sacrificing fighters as Rublevsky, Yan, Olik, and a number of others. (Olik subsequently threw himself from a steamer into the Dnieper while being fired upon and perished in the turbulent river.) And in another two or three months our Nikolai had created a group made up exclusively of intelligentsia in the settlement of Amur (near Yekaterinoslav), a group later headed by the elder Ozersky – Moisei Ozersky. This group concentrated exclusively on terrorism and was a school for terrorists. Rogdaev himself proved to be a reliable and inspirational role model for this field of activity. However, as usually happened, he was soon compelled to flee Yekaterinoslav and its environs. At the beginning of 1904 Comrade Rogadaev was accompanied by Moisei Ozersky to the Austrian border and, with a heavy heart, he left Russia.

For the time being Comrade Rogdaev remained abroad. Only some of his comrades in Nezhin and Mosei Ozersky knew his whereabouts. More than a year passed by. Then it was autumn 1905. The total defeat of the bourgeois-autocratic system's adventure in the Far East at the hands of Japan became widely known. Inside Russia revolts of revolutionary toilers flared up. In the big cities barricades were thrown up and fiercely defended. Rogdaev rushed across the border into Russia. But now he did not stay in the places where he had previously created anarcho-communist groups. He visited them only to let them know he was still alive and that sooner or later they would see him in the forefront of their own forces fighting to make anarchism a reality in practice. Right away he took off for Moscow. He believed whole-heartedly that Moscow would be the centre from which would radiate the impulse of anarchist practice and which would provide moral inspiration for all the anarchist groups striving for the Social Revolution. For during this period in the life of Russia only we, the anarcho-communists, were putting forth the slogans of the Social Revolution, and only we defended these slogans to our last breath...

Rogdaev arrived in Moscow when the Revolution was already losing ground in the desperate struggle with the forces of reaction. Moreover he was not able to make contact with the people he had been referred to in Nezhin. So he was forced to look for kindred spirits in the streets, at the gates and barricades, and among the crowds of people. And he, as a true revolutionary possessed of the gift of oratory and the passion required of a fighter at such moments, quickly made the necessary contacts in the masses of revolutionary people and made his way through everything to the Red Gates, where he was able to get accurate information about those districts where the anarchists, and the revolutionary workers supporting them, had erected barricades and were defending them with great heroism. Two or three days later Rogadaev made his way to these barricades and, under the pseudonym (if I'm not mistaken) of "Neprimirimy" ["the Implacable"], he took part with his customary revolutionary enthusiasm in the activities going on at these barricades and in these districts. But Rogadaev was not able to display his revolutionary-anarchist capabilities to the full extent on the Moscow barricades. For within a week the revolutionary forces of Moscow were defeated. The city and its suburbs were once again in the grip of the black reaction of the bourgeois-autocratic system. A wave of mass searches, arrests, and shootings rolled over Moscow. The bourgeoisie exacted a cruel revenge against the Revolution and the bearers of its ideas. Rogdaev made his way out of Moscow with the greatest difficulty into the

countryside and then fled to the far revolutionary South – to Yekaterinoslav. That was the time when the South had not yet surrendered – in the cities and large villages the revolutionary toilers were still putting up a desperate fight against the attacks of the Reaction. Here Rogdaev, along with two or three comrades who were enthusiasts like himself, put together a Yekaterinoslav organization of anarcho-communists from the previously created groups. Upon his initiative and with his direct participation this organization carried out the expropriation of a mail train on the Yekaterinoslav railway line. The money taken in this action was used to set up a print shop at the place of residence of the Tsar himself – at Livada near the city of Yalta.

The publication of timely literature, in particular flyers appealing for help for the organization, soon evoked a sympathetic reaction among workers, peasants, and the revolutionary intelligentsia. Comrade Rogdaev expertly selected a team from within the organization which he turned into fine propagandists and organizers. It was thanks to his efforts that the Yekaterinoslav organization was the source of a number of excellent activists of anarchism, some of whom were responsible for inspiring and directing that organization over a period of many years. In fact some of them are still around, despite all the machinations of the Bolshevik dictatorship which has hounded them from one place of exile to another.

And it was while he was based in Yekaterinoslav that Nikolai Rogdaev, under the pseudonym Uncle Vanya<sup>15</sup>, became famous throughout Russia. He was particularly renowned for his selfless courage in rescuing condemned prisoners who were being conveyed under escort from the court where they had just been sentenced to death to the prison where the sentence was to be carried out.

Such daring enterprises, meticulously planned, were characteristic of the Yekaterinoslav organization under the ideological and organizational leadership of the tenacious “Uncle Vanya,” who usually played the primary role in these schemes.

Rogdaev – Uncle Vanya – was responsible for splitting the Socialist-Revolutionary organization in Sevastopol at the beginning of 1907 when 50 members, the most outstanding workers of the organization of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, led by Comrade Mitrofan, accepted the ideas of anarcho-communism and formed their own organization under the slogan “Freedom Is Inside Us”. Mind you, Uncle Vanya was the last person to brag about this matter, especially since the person officially responsible for the SR split was Comrade Sergei Borisov<sup>16</sup>, leader of the international group of anarcho-communists. But Comrade Borisov would never have made any headway in this direction on his own without “Uncle Vanya.” Moreover, in all the negotiations and debates with Mitrofan’s SR group the leading role was taken by Uncle Vanya. At the instigation of Uncle Vanya the apartment of Comrade Borisov was used to set a trap for the most prominent officials of the Sevastopol police force and the local section of the Okrana including its chief. As a result almost all of these persons were blown up by a specially prepared bomb of the Macedonian type.

In the area of debates with opponents of anarchism, Uncle Vanya never let down our propagandists. Always, when our opponents called for a debate on principles, our comrades would send for Uncle Vanya. And our opponents always suffered defeat and their ranks were most often

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<sup>15</sup> “Uncle Vanya” is the title character of a popular play by Chekov. Applied to Rogdaev the name was surely ironic, for the fictional Vanya was an indolent, incompetent failure.

<sup>16</sup> Sergei Makarovich Borisov (1884-?) was born in Kharkov and began work there as a lathe operator at the age of 16. At first he joined a social-democratic group, but soon switched to the anarchists. See Viktor Savchenko, Anarchist-terrorists in Odessa (1903-1913), (Odessa, 2006) [in Russian].

depleted while ours expanded, for the workers and revolutionary intellectuals abandoned them and transferred to our side.

In 1907 Uncle Vanya represented Russian anarchism at the International Congress of anarchists in Amsterdam.

At the Amsterdam Congress Uncle Vanya enjoyed a well-deserved status as the first among equals of the representatives of the Russian anarcho-communist movement.

Representatives of the anarchist movement from other countries who were present at this congress speak even now of the impact of Nikolai Rogdaev – Uncle Vanya. The delegates were thrilled by his speech, which was characterized by its serious tone – full of the profundity of anarchist thought and revolutionary élan. One of the most reserved anarchists – Errico Malatesta – praised this speech enthusiastically, and Comrade Luigi Fabbri still remembers the moment with a sense of rapture. Rogdaev – Uncle Vanya or simply “Uncle”, as he was known in the South of Russia among anarchist workers and peasants – presented his experiences as a revolutionary-anarchist militant. But rather than summarize his speech at the Amsterdam Congress it would be better to refer our young comrades to the version published in the journal “Burevestnik” for 1907, or even better – the “Appendix of the Russian Anarcho-communists to the Amsterdam Congress.” The latter document was distributed in Russian as a special brochure which went through several printings and assisted greatly in the growth and activity of our groups. By consulting these documents, the comrades can form their own opinions about what Comrade Rogdaev meant to our movement and what sort of role he played in its development...<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning of 1908 Nikolai Rogdaev again appeared in Russia. This was the time when the Yekaterinoslav organization had a number of remarkable successes in its campaign of terror against tsarist satraps as well as rescuing condemned prisoners from convoys and prisons. Especially noteworthy was the spectacular rescue of Comrades Tato and Shura Mudrov from the Sevastopol prison on June 21 1907 (by means of blowing a hole in its wall). Preparations were made to break our comrades out of the Yekaterinoslav and Simferopol prisons, and Uncle Vanya was absorbed completely in organizing these escapes. Mind you, only the Simferopol operation was successful. He was not successful in Yekaterinoslav, and our best comrades together with some Socialist-Revolutionaries were shot down on the roof of the rear part of the prison structure, and many others were shot by prison guards and soldiers by order of the governor. But all this happened due to causes originating inside the prison.<sup>18</sup>

Because of this action by the governor, Uncle Vanya and the Yekaterinoslav organization organized his assassination as well as the killing of a number of other high officials of the city and the provincial government.

At the beginning of summer Uncle Vanya carried out a whole series of debates with Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries near Yekaterinoslav, in Aleksandrovsk, and near the village of Voznesenka. These debates were conducted at night in fields or in clearings in the woods. Each of the sides in the debate brought their own members and friends, so often as many as several hundred people showed up. Our boeviks [militants] had their work cut out for them

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<sup>17</sup> The minutes of the Congress have been published in English as The International Anarchist Congress - Amsterdam (1907), ed. M. Antonioli and N. McNab (Edmonton, 2009). The Appendix to this volume, pp. 161-270, contains Rogdaev's reports on the situation in Russia.

<sup>18</sup> This horrific event occurred on April 29 1908. Thirty-two prisoners were killed and another 50 wounded. Two years later Makhno himself was incarcerated in the same cell in the Yekaterinoslav prison where the ill-fated escape attempt began.

in these situations because security for these debates was the exclusive responsibility of our comrades, who were trusted by both the Social-Democrats and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

As a result of these serious and protracted debates, the Social-Democrats, it's true, were scarcely affected, but the Socialist-Revolutionaries at Yekaterinoslav and even more so at Alexandrovsk and Vosnesenka were completely vanquished. Their best members, such as Borisov, Yatsenko, and Chaika – and even whole committees of the SR organizations, crossed over to our ranks.

After this the name Uncle Vanya passed from mouth to mouth in the villages and factories as a great and intransigent fighter for justice. Masses of workers and peasants made contact with the anarchists to request over and over again that meetings be set up which would be addressed by "Uncle Vanya." But the police were hot on the trail of Uncle Vanya and he was forced to keep on the move. He had an abiding faith and hope that in the places where he had been active there would remain a core of comrades resolutely devoted to the cause of anarchism. And when autumn arrived, Uncle Vanya travelled to the city of Khotyn (province of Bessarabia) and then made his way through Austria to Geneva and Paris. There he got tied up for several months in debates with the so-called "leader" of the world proletariat – Vladimir Lenin.

In 1909 Uncle Vanya was back in Russia, helping to create the Southern Federation of Anarchists, organizing a conference in connection with the formation of this federation, etc.

It was at this time that members of the Gulai-Polye, Amur, and Khotyn anarcho-communist groups carried out the expropriation of the Khotyn post office to the tune of 89,000 rubles. Part of this sum was allocated to set up a third print shop (for by this time our organization's second print shop had already been discovered by the police). The rest of the money the organization decided to spend on weapons, on the publication of a special collection of articles on the history of the anarchist movement in Russia, and on literature in general. The organization entrusted this work to Uncle Vanya, who immediately went abroad.

Uncle Vanya fulfilled this mission with his customary efficiency and thoroughness. He forwarded to our groups two or three shipments of weapons of various calibres, with ammunition; and innumerable shipments of literature. Simultaneously he busied himself with organizing the publication of "The Almanac"<sup>19</sup> on the history of our movement in Russia. He published this work in the conscientious and painstaking manner which characterized his commitment to our movement.

From this time on our renowned Uncle Vanya did not return to Russia, at least not until the Revolution of 1917. But while he remained abroad, Uncle Vanya maintained close contact with the practical anarcho-communist movement and exercised an appreciable influence on it. He had an impact on a whole series of anarchist initiatives in the former South Russia (the present-day Ukraine), a striking example of which occurred when almost the entire Gulai-Polye group was imprisoned. Uncle Vanya wrote to our fearless and renowned terrorist – the hero Aleksandr Semeniuta<sup>20</sup>, then still at large: "The Gulai-Polyans must be liberated, no matter what..." Semeniuta got in touch with me to find out what would be the best way to carry out an attack on the prison and free us. And I well recall how a group of our militants arrived from abroad to carry out this mission, having receiving a signal from Uncle Vanya.

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<sup>19</sup> Almanac: a collection of articles on the history of the anarchist movement in Russia (Paris, 1909) [in Russian]. This work is available online at [http://socialist.memo.ru/books/perli/Almanach\\_Anarchiste.zip](http://socialist.memo.ru/books/perli/Almanach_Anarchiste.zip).

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandr Semeniuta (1883-1910) was one of the founders of the Gulai-Polye anarcho-communist group "Union of Poor Peasants". Eventually he was killed in a gun battle with police and Cossacks.

And so Uncle Vanya carried on his tireless work abroad, at a distance from the rebellious South Russia. Our enemies did not admire him for this, and some of them were to be found in our own ranks, especially the dabblers who migrated to us from the ranks of the political parties. These people tried to undermine Rogdaev's accomplishments under the black banner of anarchism in underground Russia. But they did not succeed, despite cooking up a sordid fabrication against him, according to which he was suspected of dealing in provocation, like Azef. But Rogdaev was incorruptible all his life and followed his own crystal-pure path as a militant anarchist steadfastly and proudly.

Abroad during the years of the World War, Uncle Vanya remained an unshakeable anti-militarist. In spite of his personal respect for Kropotkin, Grave, and other theoreticians of anarchism, he did not follow their line on the War, rather he pursued his own activities as an anarcho-communist propagandist and activist. As a natural consequence of this, he attacked the War and its defenders with great energy. With this goal in mind and with the object of supporting the comrades in our ranks who had taken an anarchist anti-militarist stance, he created the journal "Nabat" [Tocsin] and devoted all his energies to this organ.

Then the Russian Revolution of 1917 broke out. Some "Russian revolutionaries" hastened to use the services of the German General Staff to return to Russia. Others, less notable for their hatred for the War, exercised their rights as Russian citizens, as "inhabitants and patriots," to make their return from the countries of the Entente without the slightest hindrance. But Uncle Vanya found himself stuck in Switzerland. The politico-patriots did everything they could to make sure this anarchist rebel stayed away from the Russian Revolution as long as possible. And so it was that Rogdaev, who had pioneered the creation and consolidation of the anarcho-communist movement in Russia, who had spared neither himself nor his followers in building this movement, was left for many long months cut off from this movement. And this happened at the very moment when anarcho-communism was legalized and had emerged on the political landscape as a potential mass revolutionary movement. He was unable to support the movement directly with his organizational talent or his powerful, inspirational, oratorical skills.

In order for Rogdaev to break free of the barriers set up by the provocative activities of patriots – enemies of both the Revolution and our movement – intervention was required on the part of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies. Only a protest by this temporarily revolutionary organ of the Russian toilers freed Uncle Vanya from outrageous travel restrictions and allowed him to travel to Russia.

But his arrival in Russia was already too late. Our movement was already in the hands of newcomers who were scarcely familiar with the spirit of underground Russian anarchism, having spent little time in it. Of the ways of our movement before Rogdaev's emigration they knew nothing at all.

And Uncle Vanya didn't interfere with them. On the contrary, burning with the sincere revolutionary enthusiasm which he always and everywhere displayed, he applied himself to propagandizing the ideas of anarcho-communism without, however, disdaining the dirty work which the "swelled heads" in the anarchist movement always avoided, believing their role was to sit in federations and conferences or on the editorial board of their journals, busying themselves with scribbling on paper.

In Petrograd – present-day Leningrad – there was scarcely a factory or plant where Uncle Vanya had not spoken after his return from abroad, spreading the ideas of anarchism. And, arriving in Moscow in the spring in 1918, he continued his propagandizing efforts on behalf of

the Moscow Federation of Anarchists. Here he again clashed in debates with the Bolshevik big shots – Lenin, Trotsky, and the rest. He demolished them in fine style, pulling the audience to his own side. But standing behind the Bolshevik leaders at that time was an already powerful political force – the Cheka. As a result these leaders were free to do as they pleased and shamefully trampled on the body of the Revolution...

During the same spring, the Bureau of Anarchists of the Donets Basin announced in its organ “The Anarchist,” with corresponding posters sent to all the cities and large villages, that in the near future two anarchists – Yuda Grossman-Roshchin<sup>21</sup> and Uncle Vanya – would be arriving in Yekaterinoslav to propagandize the ideas of anarcho-communism and that they would be making a tour of the whole region. And you couldn’t help noticing how worried the state socialists in our region became. They knew Uncle Vanya from their previous debates with him. And the peasants, the workers, and the progressive intelligentsia awaited him with joy and impatience. And of course this poster had a great effect on all our groups and we prepared a warm welcome for Uncle Vanya.

But the arrival of these two titans of anarchism (as they were at that time) didn’t happen because the iron hordes of the German-Austrian Army were sweeping across the whole of Ukraine and were already at the approaches to Yekaterinoslav. But still the workers and peasants hoped and waited and constantly pestered yours truly at congresses and numerous meetings with their question “When is Uncle coming?”

At the beginning of 1919, when I was already at the head of the Revolutionary Insurgent Movement (Makhnovist), Uncle Vanya moved from Moscow to Samara and worked in the Samara federation of anarcho-communists.

The movement directed by me spread and freed a huge territory from the Denikenist pomeshchik-backed counterrevolutionary hordes. All the best forces of our Gulai-Polye group of anarcho-communists were thrown into the fray. There were few anarchists from elsewhere and the majority of them were from Jewish families and were poorly informed about peasant issues. Arshinov occupied the job of my personal secretary and was also absorbed in producing the insurgent newspaper “The Road to Freedom.”

A group of 35 anarcho-communists arrived from Ivano-Vosnesensk but they included few propagandists. I felt that in a month or two we would find ourselves unable to provide propaganda services to the liberated regions. We needed Uncle Vanya so I, after consulting first with Arshinov, and then with the army staff and the Insurgents’ Council, provided a courier with the appropriate documents and the necessary funds, and sent him to Samara to Uncle Vanya. But half way to Samara the Bolsheviks arrested him and several days passed before I was able to secure his release. Then it took several more days to prepare another courier. But before this second courier reached Samara, and before Uncle Vanya and his partner could get ready to depart for our region, Lenin and Trotsky declared me and our insurgency outside the law and sent their own slaves against us and against the Revolution. And Uncle Vanya and the courier remained in Samara and immediately released a fiery proclamation of protest which explained to the toilers about the dark treachery of the Bolsheviks, about how they misled their own Red Army soldiers-slaves, and hurled them against us...

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<sup>21</sup> Yuda Grossman-Roshchin (1883-1934) was a Jewish-Ukrainian anarchist intellectual who started out as a fanatical anarcho-communist and later became an equally fanatical anarcho-syndicalist. Makhno writes of him contemptuously in his memoirs.

After that I was left almost alone with our glorious insurgent peasants and workers. Arshinov disappeared around that time, but I never ceased to think of Uncle Vanya and regret that he was not beside me.

But the next few months were fortunate for me. My partisans inflicted heavy defeats on the Denikenist corps in Ukraine. I cleared eleven uyezds and two gubernia capitals<sup>22</sup> of Denikenist troops and their civilian apparatus. Our comrades began to flock around again; but now I was less naive in my dealings with them. My attention was fixed on Samara, on Uncle Vanya. At the first convenient moment I sent another courier to him. And what did I receive from my beloved Uncle Vanya? He sent a message back by my courier: "I have received information (perhaps it isn't true) that Mikhailovich [read Volin – N. M.] is playing a large, even dominating, role in your movement. I've never had any personal relations with him except for the fact that he once stuck a knife in my back; this I will never forget..."

[Note: This refers to the time when Mikhailovich (Volin) worked for V. L. Burtsev<sup>23</sup>, who had access to a former chief of the Okhrana – Lopukhin<sup>24</sup>. It was evidence supplied by Lopukhin which led to the exposure of the provocateur Azef, who worked for both the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the tsarist Okhrana. The revolutionary Russian emigrant community regarded Burtsev as an "infallible" expert in the exposure of provocateurs and set him on a pedestal. Our anarchist emigrant milieu also did not refrain from this uncritical adulation. For some reason Burtsev was regarded even by the anarchists as a sage and they often referred matters to him, matters both great and small, and asked him to investigate them and offer his considered opinion. So it was that some lowlife types cast aspersions on Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev, whispering behind his back that he was a provocateur. The context was as follows: the activities of the Russian anarchist emigration suffered a setback because one of their active workers was arrested by the police. Our community immediately consulted Burtsev for his opinion. But Burtsev only speculated that this provocation obviously originated with a prominent anarchist activist, and that the most prominent anarchist activist was Rogdaev. This provided a weapon in the hands of these low life types, who were trying to undermine Rogdaev's reputation as the leading pioneer of underground Russian anarchism. Because of the vile rumours circulating, a number of experienced anarchist activists, including Orgeiani [Gogeliia] and M. Korn, set up an unofficial court to try Rogdaev's case. This court investigated these patently false allegations and categorically rejected them.]<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Yekaterinoslav and Berdiansk, the capitals of Yekaterinoslavskaya and Tavricheskaya gubernias (provinces) respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Vladimir Burtsev (1862-1942) was a Russian revolutionary scholar and publisher renowned for exposing agents of the Okhrana (tsarist secret police). Ironically Volin, who had fled Russia in 1907, left the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and joined the anarchists after Burtsev's exposure of the double agent Evno Azef.

<sup>24</sup> Alexei Lopukhin (1864-1928), once the highest police official in Russia, was a liberal who objected to police provocations and cooperated with Burtsev.

<sup>25</sup> Throughout the first half of Rogdaev's revolutionary career, he was dogged by accusations that he was an agent of the Okhrana. Previous to the episode Makhno mentions, such accusations had been made by the Bund (a Jewish socialist party active in the Russian Empire) and Bulgarian social-democrats. The only basis for these accusations was that he had been arrested several times by the Okhrana (in 1900, 1901, 1903, and 1906) and released after a relatively short detention. This persecution so incensed Rogdaev that he went on a witchhunt himself, trying to expose Okhrana agents in the Russian anarchist movement abroad. After the Russian Revolution of February 1917, the revolutionaries gained access to the Okhrana files, which vindicated Rogdaev but also implicated several formerly prominent members of the anarchist movement. For details, see Michael Confino, *Anarchistes en Exil* (Paris, 1995), pp. 460, 467.

So because of Volin's presence in the Makhnovist movement (although Volin had in fact already left our movement), Uncle Vanya refused to respond to my repeated appeals to join the Makhnovshchina. And of course I could do nothing. I no longer had the time or the strength to convince him that Volin was no longer part of our movement...

However I knew that Uncle Vanya did not cease to take an interest in the fate of the movement I directed. As proof of this I can mention his numerous letters, as well as a remarkable declaration he made to Lenin.

As is well known, in 1920 Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin, a close personal friend of Uncle Vanya from emigration, summoned him to Moscow – to the Kremlin – and offered him, since he knew European languages, a high post in the staff of the commander-in-chief of the Western Front. At the same time he asked Uncle Vanya to visit Makhno's headquarters and convince Makhno to submit to "Soviet" power.

Then Uncle Vanya replied to Lenin:

"As you well know, Vladimir, Soviet power under the direction of your party destroyed all the anarchist organizations. As a veteran revolutionary-anarchist, this precludes my accepting your offer of a position..."

"As for trying to convince Makhno, that's quite impossible. You have done everything possible to compel Makhno to come forward on behalf of the toiling population against the tyranny imposed by Soviet power. These working people have created a revolutionary insurgency which recognizes Makhno as its leader."

Lenin spoke at length with Uncle Vanya on this subject, but the latter would not agree to anything and returned again to Samara. However he soon felt the consequences of his frank discussion with Lenin, for the Cheka clamped down on him so he not only could not speak at any kind of meetings, but he also lost the freedom to travel from one place to another. After this everything he did was subject to the approval and supervision of the Cheka, and his life was basically run by the Cheka. So it happened that Rogdaev had, so to speak, to take on a new revolutionary anarchist orientation. He contemplated going underground and being more active in that way, just he had served our movement earlier. For this purpose he began to recruit reliable comrades from among our young and energetic friends. But he encountered many obstacles. By that time a whole bunch of long-time activists of Russian anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism had already gone to work in Soviet institutions – some because they were worn down by hunger, others because they had simply switched loyalties. The Bolshevik brass, quite familiar with Rogdaev, used him as a warning example for our comrades who were working for them, condemning him for being secretly hostile to Soviet power and increasing the Cheka's surveillance of his activities. Confronted with this surveillance and similar deliberately imposed stresses on the life of Comrade Rogadaev, our young comrades were naturally hesitant about going underground, and Rogdaev found himself alone in seeking to follow that path.

And so our valiant Nikolai, suffering mental torment and exhausted physically, batted about by the cursed paws of the Cheka, suffered stoically from starvation for several months. But in the end he took a post in the Commissariat of Education, rapidly progressing to the position of general secretary of the Department of Renewal, part of the Caucasus Executive Committee of Soviets in Tiflis. Here he created an atlas and dictionary of Oriental studies for this department, and advanced to the first ranks of scientific workers in this field. Simultaneously he established contact with anarchists abroad, in particular with our group in Paris. He wrote articles and provided material support for our journal "Delo Truda." Senior Bolshevik officials took note of Com-

rade Rogdaev's outstanding abilities as an educationalist and transferred him from the Caucasus to Moscow.

In Moscow Rogdaev encountered long-time adherents of the ideas of revolutionary anarchism, people experienced in both theory and practice, and found a common language with them. He occupied himself with reading articles and reports about anarchism in Western Europe; in particular he followed the activities and writings of Malatesta, F. Domela Nieuwenheis, and others, and drew them to our attention... And he took an active part in analyzing the state of our Russian anarchist movement. But he soon found such important work could not be pursued in the shadow of the G.P.U. Rogdaev then made a request to our "Group of Russian Anarchists in Paris." He asked us to look into finding a printer and the necessary funds to publish an "Almanac" on the history of the anarchist movement in Russia before and during the Revolution. He promised to prepare all the materials for this Almanac in Russia, with the help of our friends there. He placed great hope in such an Almanac as an important aid in teaching our young anarchist generation about practical ideological work.

Alas, this was not to be! Arshinov at this time was busy developing the "theoretical" foundations (if one may call it that) of a new direction in anarchism and, apparently, could not devote the necessary attention to this great project of Comrade Rogdaev and his circle of friends. Or maybe he just wasn't interested. As for myself, I had already left the group and suitable people for such a project were lacking among the remaining members. And it wasn't feasible to hand the project off to the American comrades, since the majority of them were firm supporters of Arshinov while the minority was weak. In addition, I had personally become somewhat estranged from most of my American friends by that time, partly by my own fault and partly because of the splits that were happening. I couldn't approach the "Probuzhdeniye" [Awakening] group about the Almanac because some of the comrades of this group had attacked our Moscow comrades for criticizing the newspaper "Rassvet" [Dawn]. The "Probuzhdeniye" comrades didn't bother to explain that "Rassvet" wasn't an anarchist publication, but rather the organ of a Russian emigrant worker society. Instead they rushed to accuse the Moscow comrades of being agents of Soviet power, possibly even agents of the GPU. And this was at a time when this Soviet power with its GPU was tormenting and continues to torment the bodies and minds of these comrades.

It's true, all this has little to do with our memories about Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev. But it's worth mentioning these things now for thanks to such goings on we have committed mistake after mistake, and ruined our great common cause here in emigration. And the GPU, slowly but surely, destroyed the life of a great pioneer of Russian revolutionary anarchism – the glorious rebel anarchist-communist Nikolai Rogdaev. And now this rebel is neither beside us nor far from us. He died while deprived of freedom and normal nourishment and lies on the remote Transcaspian steppe... But let all of this serve as a lesson for the future – both for us and for the younger generation.

And you, dear friend, our comrade and brother, rest in peace. For your cause is our cause. It will never die. Renewed, re-invigorated, beneficial for the lives and struggles of toiling humanity, it will find its resonance in successive generations of the living...

Friend, we will always remember you!

Cursed be those who vilely slandered you and tormented you in their petty, mean-spirited fashion, slowly but methodically. They tormented your spirit and your heart until you were dead.

France, 1933.

From the editorial board of "Probuzhdeniye":

This article of Comrade Makhno was found among his papers after his death. It was forwarded to us by G. Kuzmenko<sup>26</sup>, who informs us that it was not submitted in a timely fashion to "Probuzhdeniye" because the author had lacked the funds for postage. Then he became dangerously ill and ended up in the hospital.

<https://libcom.org/library/over-fresh-grave-comrade-n-rogdaev>

"Probuzhdeniye" No. 52-53, November - December, 1934. *Translation from the Russian and editing by Malcolm Archibald*

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<sup>26</sup> Galina Kuzmenko (1892-1978) was Makhno's (estranged) wife, who received his papers after his death. This archive has not survived.

# **The Anarchist Revolution**

Nestor Makhno

# 1

ANARCHISM — a life of freedom and creative independence for humanity.

Anarchism does not depend on theory or programs, which try to grasp man's life in its entirety. It is a teaching, which is based on real life, which outgrows all artificial limitations, which cannot be constricted by any system.

Anarchism's outward form is a free, non-governed society, which offers freedom, equality and solidarity for its members. Its foundations are to be found in man's sense of mutual responsibility, which has remained unchanged in all places and times. This sense of responsibility is capable of securing freedom and social justice for all men by its own unaided efforts. It is also the foundation of true communism.

Anarchism therefore is a part of human nature, communism its logical extension.

This led to the necessity of formulating anarchism's basic theories by the use of factual material and by systematized analysis. Some people (enemies of freedom, enemies of solidarity) were to try and conceal anarchism's truths or to slander its ideals; others (fighters for man's right to lead a proper life) were to develop and clarify this ideal. I think that Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Most, Kropotkin, Malatesta, S. Faure, and others never believed, that they could harness anarchism, a framework of immutable scientific dogma, by their theories. Instead, the teachings of anarchism represent a concerted effort to show its roots in human nature, and to prove that man's creative achievements never deviate from it; anarchism's fundamental trait, the negation of all bondage and servitude, is likewise to be found in human nature.

Anarchism means freedom; socialism cannot destroy chains or bondage.

I am an anarchist and a revolutionary myself, and I took part in the activities of the revolutionary peoples of the Ukraine. The Ukrainians are a people who grasp instinctively the meaning of the anarchist ideas and who act them out. They suffered incredible hardship, but have never ceased to talk of their freedom and freedom in their form of life. I often made tactical errors on this difficult path, as I was often weak and unable to make judgements. But because I correctly understood the goal towards which I and my brothers were working and I was able to observe the effect of living anarchism during the struggle for freedom and independence. I remain convinced on the grounds of my practical fighting experience that anarchism is as revolutionary, as diverse, and as sublime in every facet as is human life itself. Even if I only felt the remotest glimmer of sympathy for anarcho-revolutionary activity I would still call on you, reader and brother, to take up the struggle for the ideal anarchism, for only if you fight for this ideal and uphold it will you understand it properly. Anarchism is revolutionary in this and many other aspects. The more awake a man is, the deeper his thoughts about his situation are. He will recognize his state of slavery and the anarchistic and revolutionary spirit within him will wake and show itself in his thoughts and actions. It is the same for every man and woman, even if they could never have heard of it.

Anarchism plays a considerable role in the enrichment of human life, a fact recognized by the oppressors as well as by the oppressed. The oppressors do their best to distort the ideal of anarchism; the others do their best to carry it further. Modern civilization has succeeded in making anarchism ever more prominent for both masters and slaves, but has never been able to lull or extinguish this fundamental protest of human nature, for it has been unable to stamp out the independent intellects who have proven that God does not exist. Once this has been proven it

was easy to draw back the veil which hides the artificiality of the priesthood and the hierarchies which it supports.

But various other ideas have been propounded alongside anarchism: "liberalism", socialism and bolshevik communism. These doctrines, despite their large influence on modern society, despite their triumph over both reaction and freedom, are on shaky ground because of their artificiality, their disavowal of organic development and their tendency towards paralysis.

The free man, on the other hand, has thrown away the trammels of the past together with its lies and brutality. He has buried the rotten corpse of slavery and the notion that the past is better. Man has already partially liberated himself from the fog of lies and brutality, which enslaved him from the day of his birth, from the worship of the bayonet, money, legality, and hypocritical science.

While man frees himself from this insult he understands himself better, and once he has understood himself, the book of his life is opened to him. In it he immediately sees that his former life was nothing but loathsome slavery and that this framework of slavery has conspired to stifle all his innate good qualities. He sees that this life has turned him into a beast of burden, a slave for some or a master over others, or into a fool who tears down and tramples on all that is noble in man when ordered to do so. But when freedom awakes in man, it treads all artificialities into the dust and all that stands in the way of independent creativity. This is how man moves in his process of development. In former times he moved in spans of a generation or so, but now the process is moving year by year; man does not wish to be an academic mouthpiece of the rule over others or to tolerate the rule of others over himself. Once man is free from earthly and "heavenly" gods, free from "good manners" and from his morality, which depends on these Gods, he lifts up his voice and struggles against the enslavement of mankind and the distortion of his nature.

The man of protest, who has fully grasped his identity and who now sees with his eyes fully open, who now thirsts for freedom and totality, now creates groups of free men welded together by the ideal and by the action. Whoever comes into contact with these groups will cast off his status of lackey and will free himself from the idiot domination of others over him. Any ordinary man who comes from the plough, the factory, the bench of the university or from the bench of the academic will recognize the degradation of slavery. As man uncovers his true personality, he will throw away all artificial ideas, which go against the rights of his personality, the Master/Slave relationship of modern society. As soon as man brings to the fore the pure elements in his personality through which a new, free human community is born, he will become an anarchist and revolutionary. This is how the ideal of anarchism is assimilated and disseminated by men; the free man recognizes its deep truth, its clarity, and its purity, its message of freedom and creativity.

The idea of anarchism, the teaching of a renewed life for man as an individual and as a social being, is therefore bound up with man's self-awareness and his awareness of the suppurating sore of injustice in modern society. Anarchism exists therefore only illegally or semi-legally, never in total legality.

In the modern world, society does not live for itself but for the preservation of the Master/Slave relationship, the State. One could go further and say that society has completely de-personalized itself. In human terms, it does not exist at all. It is widely believed however that the State is Society. But is "Society" a group of men who live it up while sitting on the shoulders of all humanity? Why is man as an individual or as a mass numbering hundreds of millions nothing in comparison with this slothful group of "political leaders"? These hyenas, rulers both

of right and left wing, are rightly upset with the idea of anarchism. The bourgeois at least are frank about this. But state-socialists of all denominations, including Bolsheviks, are busy swapping the names of bourgeois rule with those of their own invention, while leaving its structure essentially unchanged. They are therefore trying to salvage the Master/Slave relationship with all its contradictions. And although they are aware that these contradictions are totally irreconcilable with their professional ideas, they nevertheless uphold them in order to forestall the putting into practice of Anarchist Communism. In their programs, the state-socialists said that man must be allowed to free himself "socially". But of man's spiritual freedom, of his human freedom, no word was spoken. Instead, they are now making sure that such a liberation of man outside their tutelage cannot be carried through. "Liberation" under the management of any government or political set-up — what's that got to do with freedom? The bourgeois, who never applies himself to the task of making anything beautiful or useful, says to the worker: "Once a slave, always a slave. We cannot reform social life because we have got too much capital in industry and in agriculture. Besides, modern life is pleasant for us; all the kings, presidents, and their governments cater for our wishes and bow before us. The slaves are their responsibility." Or he says: "The life of our modern society is full of great promises!"

"No, no!" screams the bourgeois socialists and communists. "We disagree!!" Then they rush to the workers, marshal them into parties, and call on them to rebel as follows: "Drive out the bourgeois from their positions and hand their power over to us. We will work for you. We will liberate you."

So the workers, whose hatred of government is even greater than their hatred of parasites, rise up in revolution to destroy the machinery of power and its representatives. But either because of clumsiness or naivete, they allow socialism to come to power. This is how the communists got into power in Russia. These communists are real dregs of mankind. They tear down and shoot innocent people and hang liberty; they shoot men exactly as the bourgeois did. They shoot men who think differently to them in order to subjugate all to their power, in order to enslave him to the throne of government they have just taken over. They hire guards for themselves and killers for dealing with free men. Under the weight of the chains made by the new "Workers' Republic" in Russia, man groans and sighs as he did under bourgeois rule. Elsewhere, man is groaning under the yoke of the bourgeoisie or under that of the bourgeois socialist. The hangmen, both old and new, are strong. They have mastered the art of tactical suppression of opposition, and man only flares up briefly to contest his rights before sinking down again under the burden of authority and despair. He drops his hands as the noose is thrown around his neck again, shutting his eyes like a slave before the gleeful hangman.

From these unfolding vistas of human misery and from personal misery, man must forge convictions, call other men his brothers, and fight for freedom. Man is only free if he is prepared to kill every hangman and every power magnate if they do not wish to stop their shameful tasks. He is only free if he does not put a prime on changing his government and is not led astray by the "Workers' Republic" of the Bolsheviks. He must vouch for the establishment of a truly free society based on personal responsibility, the only really free society. His pronouncement on the State must be one of total destruction: "No. This must not be. To rebellion! Rise up, brothers, against all government, destroy the power of the bourgeoisie and do not allow the socialists and bolshevik government to come to life! Destroy all authority and drive out its representatives!"

There are even moments when the authority of the socialists and communists is worse than the bourgeois, for they tear down their own ideas and trample on them. After fumbling about

in secret for the keys to bourgeois government, the communists became guilty and furtive; they do not want the masses to see what they are doing, so they lie and cheat and deceive. If the masses notice this, they seethe with indignation. So the government falls upon them in an orgy of irresponsibility and butchers them in the name of "socialism" and "communism". The government has of course long since thrown these ideas into the dustbin. At such moments the rule of the socialists and Bolsheviks is more degraded than that of the bourgeoisie for it is even unoriginal in its recourse to the mechanics of bourgeois oppression. While a bourgeois government strings a revolutionary up on the gallows, socialist or bolshevik-communist governments will creep up and strangle him in his sleep or kill him by trickery. Both acts are depraved. But the socialists are more depraved because of their methods.

Any political revolution in which the bourgeoisie, the socialists and state-communists struggle with each other over political ascendancy while dragging in the masses will show the traits outlined above, the most obvious example being the Russian Revolutions of February and October 1917. When the working masses that made up Tsarist Russia felt themselves partially freed from reaction, they began to work towards total freedom. They expressed this wish by expropriating landlords and monasteries and by handing over their lands to the people who wished to cultivate it with hired labor. Sometimes factories, works, presses, and other businesses were taken over by those who worked in them. Attempts were made to create liaisons between towns and villages. And while they were engaged in this activity the people were of course unaware that there were governments sitting about in Kiev, Kharkov, St. Petersburg, and elsewhere. The people were in fact laying the foundations for a new, free society that would throw out all parasites and governments and the idiocy of power. This healthy activity was especially noticeable in the Ural, in Siberia, and in the Ukraine. It was remarked upon by the old as well as the new regimes in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, and Tiflis. But the socialists as well as the Bolsheviks had (and still have) a widely dispersed party membership and a well-distributed network of professional killers. It must be added that, besides these professional killers, they also hired people from our own ranks. With the help of these people they managed to nip the people's freedom in the bud. And they did a good job. The Spanish Inquisition would have been green with envy.

We now know the real truths behind government. To the Bolsheviks and socialists we say: "Shame! Dishonor! You talked such a lot about the terror of the bourgeoisie and you took the side of revolution with great zeal. But now that you are in power you show yourself the same old fools, the same lackeys of the bourgeoisie, and slaves of their methods. You have turned yourselves into bourgeois." Looking at the experiences of bolshevik communism during recent years, the bourgeois know perfectly well that this particular brand of socialism can never manage without using their methods or without hiring them in person. It knows that the exploitation and suppression of the working majority is inherent in this system, that the vicious life of sloth is not cast aside in socialism, but that it merely masquerades under another name before spreading and taking root again.

This is the Truth! You've only got to look at the bolshevik vandals and their monopoly over the people's revolutionary conquests! Look at their spies, their police, their laws, prisons, jailers, and their armies of bailiffs. The "Red" Army is only the old army under a new name.

Liberalism, socialism, Bolshevism; they are three brothers who go their different ways to grab power over man. This power is used to block man's advance towards self-realization and independence.

### *To Rebellion!*

This is the cry of the anarchist revolutionary to the exploited. Rebel, destroy all government and see that it never takes root again. Power is used by those who have never really lived by the work of their hands. Government power will never let workers tread the road to freedom; it is the instrument of the lazy who want to dominate others, and it does not matter if the power is in the hand of the bourgeois, the socialists or the Bolsheviks, it is degrading. There is no government without teeth, teeth to tear any man who longs for a free and just life.

Brother; drive out power in yourself. Never let it fascinate you or your brothers. A true collective life is not built with programs or with governments but with the freedom of mankind, with its creativity and its independence.

The freedom of any individual carries within it the seed of a free and complete community without government, a free society that lives in organic and decentralized totality, united in its pursuit of the great human goal: Anarchist Communism!

## 2

Anarchistic Communism is a great community in total harmony. It is formed voluntarily by free individuals who form associations and federations according to their needs. Anarchist Communism fights to secure man's freedom and his right to boundless development; it fights against all the evils and injustices that are inherent in governments.

The free, non-governed society aims to embellish life with its intellectual and manual work. It will have as its resources all that nature gave man as well as nature's own inexhaustible riches; it makes man drunk with the beauty of the earth and exhilarated by his own, self-made freedom. Anarchist Communism will let man develop his creative independence in all directions; its adherents will be free and happy with life, guided by brotherly work and reciprocity. They will need no prisons, hangmen, spies, or agents, which are products of the bourgeoisie and socialists, for they will have no need of the idiot robber and murderer that is the State. Prepare yourselves, brother, to create this society! Prepare organizations and ideas! Remember that your organizations must be safe from attack. The enemy of your freedom is the state personified in five figures:

- The property owner
- The lover of war
- The judge
- The priest
- Academics who distort the truth about man

These last make up "historical laws" and "judiciary norms", and scribble slickly in order to get money; they are busy all the time trying to prove the rightfulness of the first four's claims to power that degrades human life.

The enemy is strong. For millennia he has spent his time accumulating experience in robbery, violence, expropriation, and murder. He underwent an inner crisis and is now busy changing his outward aspect, but he is only doing this because his life has been threatened with the new, emerging knowledge. This new knowledge is waking man from his long sleep, freeing him from

prejudices implanted by the five, giving him a weapon to fight for his true society. This change in the outer appearance of our enemy can be seen in reformism. It was evolved to combat the revolution in which he took part. In the Russian Revolution, the five seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth. .. but this was only appearance. In reality our enemy changed his features momentarily and is now calling up new recruits to fight against us. Bolshevik communism is especially revealing in this matter; but it will be a long time before this doctrine will forget man's struggle for true freedom.

The only reliable method for waging a successful struggle against enslavement is social revolution that engages the masses in a continual struggle (evolution). When it first erupts, social revolution is elemental. It flattens the path for its own organizations while smashing any dam that is artificially set against it. These dams in fact only increase its power. Anarchist revolutionaries are already working for this, and any man who is aware of the burden of slavery on himself has a duty to aid the anarchist; at the same time every man should feel responsible to the whole of mankind when he struggles against the five of the State. Every man should also remember that the social revolution will require appropriate methods of realization; that is especially true of the anarchist who is scouting ahead along the road of freedom. During the destructive phase of the revolution, while slavery is being abolished and freedom beginning to spread in an elemental outburst, organization and steadfast methods are essential to secure the gains. In this phase the revolution needs you most urgently. The Russian Revolution, in which anarchists played a considerable role (which they could not carry through because action was denied them), brought home to us the truth that the masses who have torn themselves loose from their chains had no desire to put on others of a different make. In their revolutionary momentum, they sought immediately for free associations that would only aid their efforts to build up a new community but which would defend them against the enemy. If we look at this process closely, we come to the conclusion that the best method to create new collective freedom is the "Free Soviet". Proceeding from this conviction, the anarchist revolutionary will call the enslaved to struggle for these free associations. He will believe that social revolution will thus create freedom while smashing slavery altogether. This belief must be cherished and defended. The only people who can possibly provide the defense for this belief are the masses themselves who have made the revolution and who equate their lives with their principles. While the human masses create the revolution they instinctively cast about for free associations and rely on their inherent anarchism; they will uphold above all the Free Soviet. As the masses make a revolution they are bound to come upon this themselves and the anarchist must help them formulate this principle.

Economic problems in the free society will be resolved by the producer-consumer co-operatives in which the Free Soviets will act as co-ordinators and clarifiers. The nature of the Free Soviet during the social revolution must be to consolidate the masses' position by urging them to take their rightful inheritance (land, factories, works, mineral and coal mines, shipping, forestry, etc.) into their own hands. While groups according to interest or inclination are formed, the masses will build up an entire social fabric, freely and independently.

The struggle along this road will demand great sacrifice, for it will be the final effort of nearly free man. In this struggle there will be no hesitation, no sentimentality. Life or Death!? — This question will stand before every man who considers his rights and those of humanity to be a better life. As the healthy instincts of man will have preponderance, he will embark upon this road to life as victor and creator.

Organize yourselves, brothers, call every man to your ranks. Call him from the factory, from the school; call the students and the learned. It may be that nine out of ten academics will not come to you, or it may happen that they will come in order to deceive you if they are servants of the State's five. But the tenth man will come. He will be your friend and will help you overcome the deceit of the others. Organize yourselves; call every man to your ranks; call on all the governors to stop their stupidity and the brutalizing of human life. If they do not desist, disarm the police, the army and other organizations of the five's defense. Burn their laws and destroy their prisons, kill the hangmen, the bane of mankind. Smash authority! Call to your ranks the press-ganged army; there are many killers in the army who are against you and who are bribed to kill you. But there are friends for you even in the army. They will confound the mobs of murderers and will hurry to your side.

After we have collected ourselves into a great, universal family, brothers, we will go further in the fight against darkness. On to the universal human ideal! We will live as brothers, enslaving no one. The brute force of the enemy will be answered with the force by our revolutionary army. If our enemies do not agree with our ideal, we reply by building our new life based on individual responsibility. Only hardened criminals who belong to the five will not wish to tread the road to a new life with fruitful activity. They will try to fight us in order to regain their power. They must die.

Long live the ideal of universal human harmony, and man's fight towards it!

Long live the ideal of anarchist society!

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